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THE NEW MISTRESS.

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OUR NEW MISTRESS

OR

CHANGES AT BROOKFIELD EARL

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

AUTHOR OF

'THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE' 'UNDER THE STORM' ETC.

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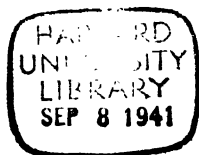


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OUR NEW MISTRESS.



CHAPTER I.

DEAR OLD GOVERNESS.

*From Bertha Hewitt's dictation to Miss Emily, one
of the ladies at St. Mary's Convalescent Home.*



SHOULD like every one to understand how it all happened, and the ladies say it will ease my mind to tell it all out ; and I am sure I have plenty of time while I am laid up here and my poor eyes will not let me study : and as to knitting, it only makes me think the more.

I shall never forget that Friday evening when we three pupil-teachers, Frances Best and Rose Shepherd and myself, had our first sight of Miss Martin getting out of the fly with her lame sister, while we crowded our heads at Governess Betsy's

B

window to see what she was like ; and Frances said, 'Such a little slip of a thing !' and I said, 'Carroty, too ! what nonsense to put her over us !' And then Francie said, 'I think so indeed ! I could twirl her round like a humming-top !' And Governess Betsy looked up from her rasher and said, 'Don't be too sure ; them carrots has tempers !' For Governess Betsy, as we called her, never was particular about grammar—nor, for that matter, were we ; though we had learnt it all, and could analyse sentences, and write it all rightly enough, we never troubled ourselves to speak differently from our old ways. Indeed, we should have been pretty well laughed at at home for pretending to talk like ladies.

I see, though, I ought to tell more from the beginning, or the ladies will not understand it. Brookfield Earl is my home ; it is the prettiest place ! I shall never care for all these rocks and cliffs and sea as I do for our nice river, gliding away under the shade of the trees, and with the tall reeds and yellow flags and long purples and dear little blue forget-me-nots on the banks, and the park stretching up behind full of hawthorns that look like snow when the blossoms are out, and lots of cowslips below. Oh dear ! I wonder when I shall see it all again ?

My father is one of the keepers to my lord, and we have a lodge close to the bridge, because

he looks after the fishing as well. And very good fishing it is. You may see one fat cunning old trout that nobody has ever been able to catch lying in the deep pool by the bridge. Father has grown quite fond of it ; I don't know what he would do if any one caught that trout. He says it has grown so sharp that it knows every fly the gentlemen can bring, and laughs at them.

I can scarcely remember the old Lord Brookfield, but I think he was a white-headed old gentleman who used to go out shooting on the little rough pony that runs about in the park now. When he died her ladyship stayed on, and lived very quietly with her daughters till they all married, except Lady Mary, who was always such a one for schools and poor people. She taught a class on Sundays, and used to go down to the cottages and read to the old women ; so that between her and the Miss Freewards, who were the former clergyman's daughters, our vicar, Mr. Hardwicke, didn't seem to have need for a wife to attend to the poor folks and the clubs.

On the other side of the river is the main part of the old village, with the schools and the church—a real dear old church, all over ivy. They say this one is a very grand one that people come to see from all parts, but I am sure I shall not care for it half so much as our own, when I am able to get there.

We all went to the schools, though my mother used to say we might have looked higher, but they were her ladyship's schools. She took a great interest in them, and they have always been very superior. My eldest sister is a lady's-maid, and the next is mantle-woman at a first-rate draper's, and my brothers are all in good situations ; but I am the youngest by a good bit, and father and mother were quite willing to keep me at home, and oblige Mrs. Pearson by letting me become a pupil-teacher.

That was not till after the changes had begun. First her old ladyship died, and when Lady Mary was gone to look after a sick old aunt there was no one at the Park to care about the schools as they had done. Then his lordship sold 'Ruination' to the pottery people. It was called the 'Ruination' because it is nasty stiff clay that nothing will grow on ; but Mr. Drake found it would make pots and pans and all those things, so that a great pottery grew up there close to the station, and numbers of houses were built, and great tall chimneys. Luckily it is a mile off, and there is all Huckster's Copse between, so that we do not see it, and all the children have to come to school at Brookfield. Such a rough lot ! picked up from all parts, and terrible poachers some of the set.

We always had two schools, boys' and girls'

The old lord built them, and they are so pretty ! with gable ends, and eaves projecting, and timbered fronts, and deep porches and windows in a honey-comb pattern of glass, and tall red chimneys in different patterns of fancy bricks, scaly and twisty-twirly ; and there is a rose all over ours, and over the boys' a Virginian creeper that makes it such a beautiful colour in autumn. Dear Mrs. Pearson had got her certificate as an acting teacher, but Governess Betsy—or Mrs. Bolton, as I ought to call her—never had one. She was Mrs. Pearson's daughter, and was her pupil-teacher, but had not got her Queen's scholarship, and before she could sit again she married poor Jem Bolton, one of our under-keepers ; but in less than three years he was shot dead by a sad accident by one of the young gentlemen visitors, who was so heedless with his gun that father always said he would be the death of somebody.

Poor gentleman, they say he never went out with a gun again, and he did handsomely by Betsy and her two little children ; but she has laid the money up in the bank for the little ones, and is gone back to teaching. The vicar, the Reverend Charles Hardwicke, was glad enough to have her, for with all these strangers pouring in they had had to build a big new room on to each of the schools. Ours has a class-room besides ; and it looks all new, and is not half so pretty as it used

to be. They made our old schoolroom into an infant room under Mrs. Bolton, and Mrs. Pearson went on in the large room, with first Frances and then me to work under her, and Rose with Mrs. Bolton.

That was after the inspection, when the inspector found ever so much fault, and there only passed sixty-five per cent., and almost all of them failed in arithmetic; and in the infant school, poor Mrs. Bolton was so flurried in her object lesson, because the gentleman made her give one upon 'a table,' when she had prepared 'a dog,' that she made the children say the table was often spotted, had two eyes, claws, and was very faithful to follow its master wherever he went. The gentlemen, and even the vicar, did laugh enough to put anybody out then, and they said something to one another about clever tables and spirits that hurt poor Governess Betsy very much, because she could not make out what they meant.

As to the children not passing, how should they when many of the Ruination set did not come to school three days in the week, and some of our own were not much better since Lady Mary had gone away? After that they settled that Mrs. Pearson should have more help; and, though I had left school a year before, they asked for me to come back and be apprenticed as pupil-teacher. Frances Best had been one for half a year before

She is an orphan of some former servants whom her ladyship had been interested about, and had been boarded with Mrs. Pearson ever since she can remember, so as to be like another child of her own. Rose is daughter to Mr. Shepherd, the carpenter, and had been kept on as monitor because nobody can get the infants to be so good as she can ; so she was apprenticed too, though she is a dear little round, fat thing, who never liked study much ; but she is very fond of little children, and her mother is quite willing to keep her on at home.

My father always says it was the worry of those children from Ruination that was the death of dear old Governess. At any rate, she had a stroke one evening just before the summer holidays, when she had come in from school, and never spoke again, but died before the week was out. If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget her funeral. We were all there of course, with wreaths and crosses of flowers ; and many grown-up persons too, for she had been mistress thirty-two years ; all in mourning, and all the choir there ; and when the vicar gave out, 'Labourer, rest, thy work is done,' one could hardly hear for the sobbing and crying, only luckily the boys did not feel it so much, and could sing out loud enough ; and, as the vicar said in his sermon on Sunday (the text of it was, 'Her own works do praise her in the gates'), she had done a great

deal for the place, and we might well be grateful to her, for she was a real right down religious woman as ever lived, and cared for nothing so much as making people good. When one looks round, and counts up, almost all the best mothers in the parish are her old scholars; and, though I was a very little girl, I shall always remember how she talked to me and made me really sorry that time when I had been eating sweets in church, and told a story about it. I never, that I know of, told a falsehood again, though I have not always been as good as she would have made me; and partly, of late because I did so detest any one who came in her stead and changed her ways.

We all thought Mrs. Bolton would have been mistress, and so no doubt she would have been if her ladyship had been there, and there had been none of that rough lot at Ruination. She says she would not have taken it; the inspection days and the time-table are more than she can bear; but she was hurt never to have it even offered to her, but to be left to go on with the infants; and most of us belonging to the place felt just the same, and that her ladyship would have done her justice. I heard that Mrs. Shepherd did speak out her mind to Mr. Hardwicke; and he answered, 'Yes, Mrs. Shepherd, but we have to think of justice to the children too.'

Then we heard that a stranger was coming, a

Miss Martin, who had come out very high up in the list at Fishponds Training College. The vicar had said at first that most likely the new mistress might be glad to lodge and board with Mrs. Bolton, but then it turned out that she had a sister who would live with her, and thus she wanted a house to herself. They were daughters to an upholsterer's foreman, we heard.

Mrs. Bolton lives in the rooms belonging to the school, and the managers would not turn her out ; and, after some contriving, it was arranged that Miss Martin should have the cottage at the corner of the lane leading to our bridge, nearly opposite to the schools. It is a little bit of a place with only two rooms, and a back kitchen like a lean-to ; but Mr. Shepherd was sent to repair it and board the floor, and furniture was sent in, much better and more stylish, Governess Betsy said, than ever had been got for her mother.

And there she was, getting ever so many boxes and parcels out of the fly. 'Fly, indeed !' said Governess Betsy ; 'a spring cart was good enough for me. Only half a mile from the station too.'

Presently she began to wonder whether one of us ought not to run across and see whether they wanted anything, though we knew that the vicar's house-keeper had been down to see that the fire was lighted, and the kettle and things arranged in readiness.

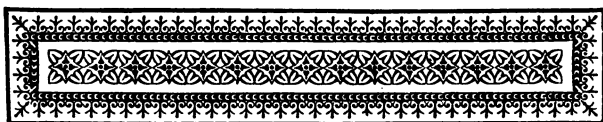
Mrs. Bolton said she could not go, as she should

burst out crying in her face ; and Frances could not bear the thought of her, and Rose was shy ; so, as I rather wanted to see what she was like, I said I would go on my way home.

The door was fastened inside, and I knocked twice before it was opened, only a little way ; and I said, ' Please, Miss Martin, I am pupil-teacher, and I came to see if I could do anything for you.'

Then she thanked me, and said she hoped we should be good friends, but she did not want anything that evening ; it was all very nice. She did not ask me in, nor open the door wide enough for me to see in, but wished me good-night, and shut herself up as if she wanted to get rid of me.





CHAPTER II.

THE NEW-COMER.

NO one saw anything of Miss Martin all Saturday, except that she went to the shops and bought some bread and other things, and asked how to get her meat and milk.

Mrs. Bryce, the butcher's wife, said she was a pleasant-spoken young person, and she thought would be a great improvement ; but Mrs. Bryce is a new-comer, Mr. Bryce's second wife, and had no feeling for Brookfield folk. Indeed, she had hurt dear old Mrs. Pearson very much by saying Edith and Gertrude learnt nothing but vulgar ways, and she had talked of sending them to school at Overbury. We had no notion of a stranger like her talking of our wanting improvement here at Brookfield Earl !

We went more by what Susan Elcock at the post office said : that Miss Martin was civil enough, but seemed stiffish and stuck up, and as if she meant to keep herself to herself ; for when Susan offered to

go and see the one at home, who would be lonely all day, Miss Martin thanked her and said her sister was quite an invalid and not equal to visitors.

That was a change from motherly Governess, to whom everybody was always stepping in after school hours with every bit of news, as of course she had known them all from babies, and cared as if they were her own, often sitting up at night with any one who was ill ; and oh ! how sleepy she used to be at school after it ! so that once she told Janie Jones that nine times seven made the capital of France, and another time she said that Galilee was half-way to Overbury. And when she nodded over the needlework the Ruination lot did make a row ! But then we knew why she was tired, and loved her the better for it.

Mr. Hardwicke called in to see her that day ; but I do not think any one else was let in except Mr. Shepherd, who came to fix some things ; and he said that they were both nice, tidy, handy young women enough, quite the ladies ; and the lame one—they called her Amy, and the other Jessie—would be very pretty if she did not look so sickly, and was not so lame and crooked.

‘Think of that !’ said Rose when she told us, almost as if she thought it a shame in her father to have a word to say for them. ‘I’ll never say she is pretty ! I’m glad I’m not to be under her !’

Sunday school was uncommonly full. Every-

one wanted to see Miss Martin, and after all she was not there ; but school was just as usual, with the Sunday teachers who helped while the Miss Freewards were away. Governess Betsy taught the little ones, and sat with us in church.

We saw Miss Martin come into church all alone, all in black silk, but with a hat with a bunch of blue corn-flowers, and a blue handkerchief to match.

No doubt it was not right to look at her instead of minding the service, but I must confess that almost all of us did—except, perhaps, Frances, who never does take her eyes off from where they ought to be. Mrs. Bolton had to poke some of them for staring and whispering ; indeed, Fanny Morgan was almost crying, and I heard her mutter, ‘ I never *will* call her Governess.’ ‘ Nor I,’ said Susan Kemp ; ‘ I shall call her,’ I think it was going to be ‘ Carrots,’ but just then Mrs. Bolton gave her a great frown and shake of the head, and she held her tongue.

After all it was not real carrots, not rough red hair like Tommy Rooney’s ; it was more what is called sandy. I wonder whether the golden hair they talk of in books is very different ? for this was in a yellow plait that shone in the sun just like gold ; and her eyelashes and eyebrows were quite as light. It was a thin face with some freckles and very light eyes, and very little colour in general ;

and she looked quite a girl, so slim, and not so tall as either Frances or myself.

Everybody came to school on Monday morning, except the girls that had passed the fourth standard. Of them only Annie Knowles and Jane Harris came, because the mother of Annie is very particular, and said she wouldn't have no nonsense ; and Jane's father is Mr. Hardwicke's gardener. But the other mothers said either that they did not like changes, or that they would not have their big girls taught by a chit of a maid like that ; though, as had been put into the ' Parish Magazine,' she had been two years from her training college, and had an excellent parchment and report from the place she had left.

The vicar came in and said something about all being good with her, and then read prayers and took the first class for their lesson on the Catechism, while she heard the others all together. Then she called over the names ; but it was not so very easy, for the registers had got into a muddle, and there was no knowing who had left school and who was only absent, and Mrs. Bolton had to be fetched from the infant school to explain.

All that day Miss Martin let things go on just as usual, taking the first class, and when they were writing copies the second, and the third while they did their sums. But, after all—You would never have thought it ! it was me—yes, me, Bertha Hewitt

—who was the very first person she thought fit to find fault with.

It was this way : I was thinking she should see how well I had my class in hand, when I saw that tiresome little Bella Brown writing on her neighbour's cheek with her pen instead of in her copy-book. So I gave her a little tap, and what must she do but begin to cry ! 'What is that ?' said Miss Martin.

'She hit me,' says the horrid little thing.

'She was inking Lucy Grove's face,' says I.

'Come out here,' says Miss Martin, and sets her down to go on with her copy at the mistress's desk as sulky as you please.

Well, at dinner-time, when all the children had gone out, making the noise they always did, poor things, and tumbling over one-another to get their hats and dinner-bags, Miss Martin stopped me and said, 'I must ask you to remember that I allow no blows from pupil-teachers. If a child is in fault speak to me, but do not strike her.'

'She is a very naughty child, Miss Martin,' I said ; 'she is always after some mischief——'

'That is not the question,' she said ; 'I dare say she deserved it, but it is my rule that children should never be struck by their teachers.'

Then Frances spoke up for me. 'Indeed, Miss Martin, Governess always used to say a short stripe at once and bear no malice was the best way.

If you keep them in, the mothers of them down at Ruination come up after them, and run on shameful.'

'Shamefully, I suppose you mean?' she said. 'Let that be as it may, I am not going to allow either of you to strike the children.'

'What Frances Best says is quite true, Miss Martin,' said Governess Betsy, standing in the doorway in her widow's cap, with the strings flying out behind, and little Jemmy clinging on to her apron. 'If you mean that them Ruination children is never to be beat, they will just terrify you out of your life.'

'I did not say that there was to be no corporal punishment, Mrs. Bolton, but that it should only be inflicted by the head teacher.'

'Well, you'll have enough to do,' said Mrs. Bolton, shrugging up her shoulders; and then in her good-natured way she asked the Miss Martins to tea, which we knew was a great effort to her, for it was very hard, as she said to Frances, to see that little yellow sharp-nosed thing in her own good mother's place. (Just like Mrs. Morgan's lean sandy cat in the place of the vicar's beautiful sleek tabby Persian!) And after all Miss Martin would not come; she said her sister was not able to go out, and she must stay with her.

'Well, another time when she is better,' said Mrs. Bolton, rather hurt, for she had bought some

tea-cakes, and she sent Francie and Rose to run after me to say I must come and help eat them up when our lessons after school were over.

We always used to do our lessons in Governess's little parlour, and we thought Miss Martin would have had us to her house, but she did not. She had us always in the class-room, all stuffy after school, and with all the children who did not go home to dinner making noises in the school or playground.

But, oh dear! after that one first day there never was any one so particular. It came out the very next day, when she made all the classes hang up their hats and dinner-bags in order, and told off one girl to give them out to each class as they sat; and after they had sung their Grace they all had to march out, and she taught them in time to sing as they went stumping along.

Bacon and potatoes, bacon and potatoes,
Hissing in the pan

was the favourite, whether there was any bacon or not.

Frances was the next who caught it! Miss Martin told her she could not expect her class to attend if she sat with a round back, and her ankles twisted; just as if that had anything to do with it! In fact, Miss Martin said she herself found it the best way to stand; it gave so much more command

over the children. So it might for a bit of a thing like her. But she did not order us to do it always. And I will say for her she never reproved us before the children ; she always waited till they were gone and we were at our lessons, which Rose did also with us, for Mrs. Bolton could not undertake decimals and physical geography, and all that we have to do. We wished she could, dear good creature, for by the very third day Miss Martin had told us we knew nothing of the principles of arithmetic, and that we only knew our history by the dates, just like parrots ; and she asked us questions that were such a worry that we longed for the good old times when dear Governess thought it quite enough if we said off our events and dates, and countries, chief towns, and productions, and got the answers to our sums.

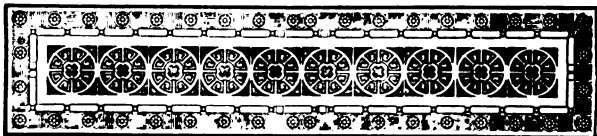
At least Frances was worried, and hated the questions ; I did not mind them so much, and they made things sometimes rather interesting, if such dull matters could be interesting. But just fancy, we were waiting for Miss Martin while she went across to fetch something, and I was reading the other two a lovely story called ' Bootles' Baby,' that I had bought at the station ; and says she, ' I can't have books like that brought to school.' I spoke up and said there was no harm in it ; I could tell her of those who said so.

' I did not say there was, Bertha, she said, ' but

I am quite sure that if you read only story-books you will spoil your taste for better things with some sense in them. I saw some such nice books in the lending library. Now if you were to get one of those travels out, you would soon come to enter into your geography, instead of its being only names.'

Wanting us to read stupid improving books out of school! Wasn't that too bad of any one?





CHAPTER III.

NEW DISCIPLINE.

WE were curious to see what would come of it with the children if they were never to be hit, but somehow that first week they were all uncommonly good. Miss Martin was something so new and strange that they did not know what to make of her, any more than if she had been some strange animal turned in among them; and besides, her eyes seemed to be everywhere, even while she was teaching her own class.

Nothing happened that could not be settled by making a little one stand ten minutes in a corner with a pinafore over her head. And as to quietness, father said he used to hear the school a quarter of a mile off, but now, as he passed by the playground, it was all so still that he stopped to listen and find out whether anything was going on, or whether we were not dismissed, and then he just heard one voice now and then.

I hear the inspector has put down the discipline of our school 'Admirable.' It was about that stillness that the first breeze came. Miss Martin was determined to break the children of doing their sums and learning their lessons out loud. Certainly it *did* make a noise when everybody was counting at once on her fingers—one, two, three, four—or saying over the line of the multiplication table she wanted; but we had been used to the hum all our lives, and minded it no more than Bessy Stokes minds the roar of the engine. Miss Martin took the classes herself when they were working, each in turn, and showed them how to manage without, and she did not make it quite a rule till she had seen that they could all get a sum done without.

Then she desired Frances and me always to check a child who began even in a whisper. I caught them up directly; I wasn't going to give her a chance to find fault with me again; and my class soon got out of the habit, though it is the third; and Frances has the second, but she thought it so very unkind that she had not the heart to do it; besides that, she was the more set against changing the old plans because Mrs. Pearson had been such a mother to her, and she was always going over the old times with Governess Betsy in the evening.

So she would not always hear when any of hers were humming over their counting on their cheeks, with a pat upon the nose, or a dig into the cheek,

when they came to the right number ; and so Miss Martin pounced down on whoever was doing it ; but when the children saw that Teacher Francie was on their side, they were less ready to give in.

At last Miss Martin made Louisa Lamb come out and sit by her, so as to see that she did not count out loud (knowing very well that she could do without). But then Louisa would not try at all, and only made white blots on the corner of her slate with her pencil, though Miss Martin told her she should not go home till the sum was done. It was only compound multiplication by six, and she could have done it in ten minutes if she had chosen ; but she came from Ruination, and she knew well what would happen, and so did we, and we watched. For the saying was that Mrs. Lamb should have been Mrs. Lion, and we had by no means forgotten how she had gone on at dear old Governess that time when Louie was punished for telling a story. Governess Betsy always said it had helped to bring on the stroke.

And sure enough, just as we had finished the tidying and putting away the work, and while we looked over our poetry, and Miss Martin had begun with Louie, 'Come now, you know what six threes are,' and Louie was giving in enough to answer, there was a great bounce at the door, and Mrs. Lamb, with her hair sticking out under her boy's old straw hat, came in, calling out, 'I've come for my maid.'

Miss Martin went out into the entry to her as quiet as possible. 'She shall come as soon as she has finished her sum.'

'I wants her now.'

'She will have finished in ten minutes, or less if she will take pains. Will you sit down and wait?' says Miss Martin, as quiet-voiced and civil as possible, but not a bit as if she meant to give way.

Then we heard Mrs. Lamb's voice beginning to rage and storm in a way that was too vulgar for me to set down here; but then there was Miss Martin's quiet, steady answer: 'I think you forget yourself, Mrs. Lamb.'

If it had been her ladyship or Lady Mary, she could not have said it in a calmer, more dignified way, and it quite daunted the woman. She began to mutter so that we could not hear what she said, Miss Martin only answering cheerfully, 'I am sure you cannot wish her not to get on, and to fall behind the others. If you will sit down a few minutes and listen, you will hear how nicely she can do her work when she tries.'

It was like a lamb that she came in at last, and then Miss Martin told Louie to show her mother how well she could do her sum, and then she should go home. We thought she would have begun to roar for her mother to hear, but I believe she wanted as much as we did to hear what was going on, and so kept still; and when Miss Martin went back to

six threes, she really did answer eighteen, and then how many farthings make a penny—fours in eighteen, and so on, as if she was quite proud to show her mother how much she knew ; and at last Mrs. Lamb went off with her, really pleased to see she was so clever, for I don't think Mrs. Lamb could have done a sum herself to save her life, and she thought it very fine, though Louie was only in the third standard at ten years old.

I was very glad that the Lion had been tamed, instead of raging about for half an hour till the vicar came upon her and frightened her with his sharp words ; but I think Francie was a little sore and jealous that Miss Martin could do so easily what dear old Governess could not do at all.

For you see that while Mrs. Pearson was a dear friend to all our own Brookfield people, she was quite cowed when those dreadful Ruination women came down upon her, and it was all the worse because she was so anxious to do her duty, and so grieved at being overcome.

I believe only one more mother ever tried flying out at Miss Martin, and that she did not get her own way any more than Mrs. Lamb. Mrs. Bryce told some one it was because the new mistress was a superior style of person, and that hurt poor Governess Betsy more than anything.

It was a wonder to see how quiet the school was, and how regularly the children came, even the

Ruination lot. When the register was called over, everybody answered, and the week's pages looked like chequer work, instead of being spotted all over with little *a*'s. She did make the lessons interesting, so the first class said, and they grew fonder of school than ever they had been before; and the younger classes were glad when she took them, as she always did in turn while the older ones were about copies or arithmetic. She was dreadfully particular, and would not pass the tiniest mistake, nor the letter *h*; but the children did not mind that as much as we did, for when she found a bad bit of needlework she always seemed to think us accountable for it, and we had to see it picked out and put in again, or if the child was cross or cried she would see to it herself. She never said much to us, only looked, and that was worse; and somehow, more by looking than speaking, she got the naughtiest ones to come ever so much cleaner and tidier.

Our own Brookfield people always did send their children nice and neat, as my lady liked to see them, and Mrs. Pearson had tried to get the new-comers to be the same; but they seemed to think it a fine thing to be independent, and so the children came in dreadful pinafores, all stains and grease, and ragged frocks, and with holes, and oh! such heads of hair! How they used to vex dear old Governess! but she only got impertinence

if she tried to mend matters. Once or twice I fancy Miss Martin did, but in spite of that the children themselves began to get the wish to look respectable ; and, as mostly their fathers had better wages than the Brookfield people, they could make their mothers manage it for them, and now the children look so neat that it is a pleasure to see them. I heard a lady remark on it the very last time I was in the school.

There was no doubt that the children got on well, and were eager about their work and places, and cared to come to school. Nor was there near so much little foolish naughtiness, such as being idle, or teasing one another, or romping and rioting in the playground. Miss Martin used to go out herself in the recess in the middle of school-time and play with them, and teach them new games, so that she prevented all rudeness, and she *would* make our Brookfield children let the Ruination ones into their games, as they never used to do.

I remember Governess Betsy standing looking over the gate, and saying, ' Quite a girl ! ' but the children liked it, and grew very fond of Miss Martin, and came and told her things, and brought her flowers and nuts, and she was very kind if any one was poorly or got hurt.

Yes, the children did like her, and I am sure the vicar did ; and we pupil-teachers enjoyed our lessons after the first, and felt ourselves to be

getting on better than ever we had done before. But it was her teaching and her management more than herself that we liked.

Partly I think it was Governess Betsy, who would hardly have liked any one to come after her mother, and who was really hurt to hear people say that the school was improved by all these new-fangled ways, which she hated. Miss Martin once offered to lend her a book about the kindergarten, and to teach Rose some of the exercises and songs. Oh dear! wasn't she angry? though of course she was civil enough to Miss Martin, and said 'Thank you,' but that she didn't want to make no change, not unless the vicar and Lady Mary wished it.

At home, though, she had enough to say about the uppishness of these young things that had been to them fine colleges, and thought they knew better than them as were mothers, and had been teaching long before they were born—which Mrs. Bolton could hardly have been, for Miss Martin was twenty-two, and she was not more than thirty, without counting the two years she was with her husband.

As to their gifts, and straws, and blocks, and exercises, and songs, they were all, to hear Governess Betsy, mere stuff and nonsense, just wasting the children's time, and saving oneself trouble in teaching them what could be of use to the poor little things. 'Making dolls' chairs! It was just

putting nonsense into their heads !' Rose says she told the vicar as much when he said something about it to her, and when he was gone she cried, and said they were plotting to turn her out and her poor little fatherless children, but she knew Lady Mary would never suffer it.

Nor do I believe the vicar ever would do so, for the babies are very good and happy with her. She is just like a mother to them, and they always come up able to read in the first standard, and to say the beginning of the Catechism and sing little hymns and know their prayers.

Rose was disappointed, for it would have been much more amusing to teach the making of little mats and frames, than to have the little boys squeaking on their slates, and rubbing things out into clouds, all the time the girls were at work ; but her governess quite scolded her for wishing it, and said it was just like girls to run after everything fresh and forget old friends. And then what do you think Miss Martin said when the first-class girls didn't like to have those Ruination ones taken up to them, and declared they were dirty and must sit apart, and Frances said it was always so before ? First she said (and one must allow it was true) that they were quite clean now ; and then she grew very angry, and told us we were just like the Pharisees, sticking ourselves apart and looking down on those who were doing their best. Frances

took it so to heart that she cried half the evening, and was always kinder to the Ruination children afterwards ; but all our people when they heard were offended, and I don't think the Ruination people liked Miss Martin a bit better for it, as she very often had to punish or keep in some of them. The big boys used to shout 'Carrots !' if they saw her in the road ; and the mothers, I do believe, were more against her than if they had ventured to come and run on at her and ease their minds.

Mrs. Bolton is a right down good woman, but I think if she would have let alone grumbling about Miss Martin, a good deal would not have happened as it did happen.





CHAPTER IV.

LOCKED DOORS.

THE real thing that prevented Miss Martin from getting on with any one was that she seemed to wish to keep herself to herself out of school hours. She never went out to tea. If she was asked—and Mrs. Bryce asked her, and several people besides—she always answered that her sister was not well enough to go out, and that she did not like to be absent from her in the evening. But then she never had any one in to tea herself, and heard all our lessons in the school. Indeed, hardly any one ever went into the house or saw the sister. The vicar did, certainly, but the saying was that the door was kept locked up ; no one was let inside. Miss Martin did all the shopping, and if anything was sent home, or a message came while she was out, Miss Amy came to the door and took it in with as few words as possible, and scarcely showing herself.

She was lame, and walked with a stick and her sister's arm the few times she was out of the house. She used to go to church to the early Holy Communion, and sometimes in the late evening when it was dark, but never to the regular Sunday service, when, indeed, her sister was with the children. She always wore black, and a bonnet, and she had brown hair. That was the most we knew, for even if one went to the door there was a curtain over it and a screen a little way inside, so that there was no seeing into the room. Only one Saturday Rose Shepherd was taking home a box that her father had been mending, when, just as she got to the door, such a hailstorm came on that Miss Amy asked her in, and brought her to the fire to dry herself.

‘And do you know,’ said Rose, ‘they had made it the prettiest room you ever did see? There was a carpet down by the fire, and a lovely worked curtain down from the mantelpiece, and dear little white china—Parian, they called it—figures upon it, and a dresser full of pretty cups and plates, and a table with a glass of flowers, and a sewing machine, and lots of books on a shelf, and pictures and photographs. Oh! and the screen at the door all covered with pictures inside, so nice and pretty! No one would ever think it was the same place where the Dowlings used to live and keep in such a mess.’

We asked how they got on, and if Miss Amy

talked. Yes, she had told Rose all the story of the little images, and about the guardian angel walking behind the little child over the stream, and the story of the martyr girl in the photograph floating down the river.

‘And,’ said Rose, ‘I really thought she was just like that girl herself.’

She really was just the same colour, and her face of the same shape ; but even at church her eyes had a startled look, not like the peacefulness of the martyr at rest.

Rose took to thinking a great deal of both the sisters after that. Perhaps it was because it is her nature to take the part of any one who is always being run down, and Governess Betsy was so fond of her little grumbles about Miss Martin, and was sure it could not be all right if they kept themselves so close, and let no one know anything about them, except that Miss Martin had been trained at Fishponds, and had had two years’ experience of school-keeping. And why should Miss Amy never go out, and be so short with every one who came to the door? There was only one other that she was willing to let in, and that was Mrs. Dyke’s little Bertie, who was only two years old, and when his mother was upstairs, when Minnie was born, was a good deal left to himself. He wandered out in the lane by himself, and Miss Amy heard him crying there, and led him in and cosseted him and

amused him till her sister came in from school and took him home. After that he was always trotting off to his Mamy, as he called her, and she always opened her door to him and made him very happy.

When Mrs. Dyke was about again she called to thank her and show the baby, and invite both of the sisters to the christening tea ; but though Miss Amy took the baby in her arms and almost cried over her, she refused, saying that she was such a poor creature that she never went out, and they must excuse her ; but she sent the loveliest pair of baby boots that ever were seen—all white in fancy knitting. Miss Martin did go for once, and my mother and Mrs. Bolton, who were godmothers, did their very best at tea-time to get something out of her. They said how sad it was for her sister to be so afflicted, and then got on to asking if she was born so or if it was an accident ; and Miss Martin coloured up as red as fire, and said, 'It was an accident.'

Then, from saying 'How sad!' and so on, mother got on to asking what accident it was. 'Falling downstairs,' says Miss Martin, quite short and stiff. 'Mr. Dyke,' in a great hurry, 'do you know what time the diocesan inspector is likely to be coming ?'

And Mr. Dyke, just as if it was on purpose, went on talking to her about inspectors, and all the ways of them, and telling stories about the children,

and quite and entirely hindered the others from getting a chance to ask any more questions.

And among the stories he told was about Lucy Morgan telling the inspector that to the west of Scotland lay the He-brides. He must have forgotten or could not have known that Mrs. Pearson always did call those islands He-brides ; and when Miss Martin went into fits of laughing, and said that she had known the girls read about a polish gentleman, as if he were a very finished one, when he really was Polish, poor Governess Betsy felt as if they were laughing at her mother, and said out quite sharp, 'Well, I'm sure older folks than you, and better too, always called p-o-l-i-s-h polish. Would you be for calling the top of that tea-caddy Po-lished now ?'

'No, Mrs. Bolton,' says Miss Martin, 'but I should a gentleman of Poland.'

'Poland or Noland I knows nothing about,' says Governess Betsy ; 'but I know I've heard my young lord called a polished gentleman, not Polish.'

'Be warned, Miss Martin,' said Mr. Dyke ; 'remember the effect of forty poles.'

'Dangerous ground !' said Miss Martin.

We three, sitting up with Arthur Norton, the boys' pupil-teacher, in the window-seat together, knew the riddle, 'How many foreigners make one uncivil ?' 'Forty poles make one rood ;' but Mrs.

Bolton did not, and she would hardly have liked it better if she had ; and when she saw us all choking with laughing in the window she turned upon us, and if we had been all the forty Poles at once she could not have scolded us worse for giggling there, and mocking and forgetting all that we owed to one that was gone, and we should never see her equal again if she did not call all the words out of their spelling. She would not stay there to hear her mother insulted ; and Frances Best, who should have more gratitude in her, should come home with her that moment.

They all went at her, declaring that to insult Mrs. Pearson's memory was the last thing any of them thought of, and talking of respect and esteem, and persuading her till she began to cry at the thought, and sat down again quite pacified, though I believe Frances and Rose 'caught it,' as Arthur would say, afterwards. I know that I did from Miss Martin herself. She said it was not nice for young people to sit tittering in a corner when their elders were talking. I am sure it would have been a very dull evening if we had not had a little fun among ourselves, and Arthur was so droll. But she was always vexed if he walked to school with me ; and once when he was getting me some blackberries and we were both too late for prayers she was downright angry, and not only reproved me, but went down and spoke to my mother about our

goings on, which her sister had somehow been spying out of her upstairs window.

Mother took my part, and said she was quite sure I was after no harm, and young folk couldn't be as grave as judges, and what we did out of school was no concern of the mistress, and that she had no notion of her girl being spied upon out of window, and by a person whom no one knew nothing about. Miss Amy had better look to herself. Then Miss Martin turned so red that mother was quite surprised, and made sure she had given it home to her and hit the right mark.

But father was not at all pleased when he heard of it. He said it was a right and friendly thing to do, and that he was sorry she had been answered in that way, for young folks were the better for a check in time, and I was getting to be a big girl now, and must be careful, for there was nothing that would be so grievous to him as for his little Bertha to get a name for being fast and going on with lads.

Mother was all the more put out with the Miss Martins for having been the cause of words from father, but she told me sharply to mind what I was about, and not bring the like on us again.

And I see now that Miss Martin was quite right and kind after all, for we were getting into ways that were not nice, and that I did not like to remember in those dreadful days, but it made me dislike Miss Martin all the more.

We thought her quite horrid at the choral society meetings. I don't know what business she had there, for she has no more voice than a tomtit, but she penned us up in a corner, and would not let us speak to anybody, or have any of the fun we used to have, and Arthur called her the Red Dragon. And only think of her calling our choral society 'very good for a village'! Why, it is well known that we have some of the best voices in the country, and that Miss Warne plays the piano as well as any performer in Overbury. She was the favourite pupil at Miss Shaw's seminary. But Arthur says it is all jealousy in Miss Martin, because she can't sing, and is cut out for an old maid, with her red hair, and that she wanted ever so much to carry on with Mr. Pierce, the exciseman, who is really quite the gentleman. He has a splendid voice, and to see him riding his bicycle! Oh! he never would look at her, they all say. Learning of her was all very well, for she does know how to teach; and so she ought, after being at a training college; and teaching under her was easier than when the children used to be more riotous; but except at lessons it was all against the grain, and I never had anything to do with her that I could help, and felt it unjust that she was so grave with me when I did my lessons so much quicker and better than either of the other two.

Frances did not care for her much more than I

did, but then good old Frances is always slow and sure, and very particular to do what she is told, whether she likes it or not ; so that she never got a scolding, nor into trouble of any kind except when she was slow and stupid about her lessons, and Miss Martin kept her late to make her understand them, and Governess Betsy was vexed that she was not ready sooner to have the class-room swept or go out on an errand. Frances was very good indeed. After what Miss Martin had said she never would read again one of those cheap tales—‘dreadfuls,’ I believe they call them—that one got at the station ; though she did not care for any book that was not horrid enough to be very interesting, not even ‘Ivanhoe.’

Rose was very different. She admired both the Miss Martins above everything, and always stood up for them, wishing very much that her work was in the upper school, so as to be with Miss Martin instead of Mrs. Bolton ; but that did not make her take more pains with her dates or her decimals, nor give up reading all the tales she could get ; but then Rose was always so romantic !

She wanted to make verses ; and once when we had, for a bit of composition, to do the history of any very dear friends we had ever heard of, Frances could think of nobody but David and Jonathan, and just wrote the Scripture words as far as there

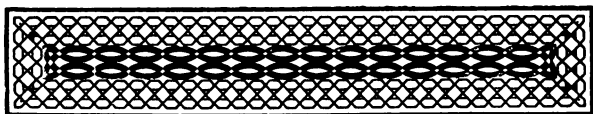
was time for ; while I did what we had read about in the 'Sixth Standard Reader,' about—oh dear ! their names are quite gone out of my head, but one lent his armour to the other, and when he was killed, dragged the man that did it round the walls at the back of his chariot. I can't remember it, but it was quite the best theme, and Miss Martin wrote 'Excellent' under it.

But when Rose's composition was called for she blushed, and put her face down on it ; and when Miss Martin pulled it out, this was all it was :—

Descend, my muse, and sing the praise
Of one as is my friend in there ;
They're sweet and loving in their ways,
They've golden and brown hair.
Oh ! would that I—

And there poor Rosie had stuck fast. We saw the corners of Miss Martin's mouth twitching as if she very much wished to laugh ; but she only said gravely, 'This is not your proper work, Rose,' and then read her something, I forget what, and made her promise to bring it written out next day. Rosie was ready to cry, but it did not make a bit of change in that great love—I mean enthusiasm—for the Miss Martins.





CHAPTER V.

A MYSTERY.

EVERYBODY was beginning to feel that there was something odd about the schoolmistress and her sister. As mother said, 'it was not natural that two young women should live so much to themselves,' and she was quite sure it could not be all right. People that were so ready to find fault with a little childish nonsense were pretty certain to have been to blame themselves, and she should never forget how red Miss Martin went at her hint that Miss Amy should look at home.

She said so one evening when she and I had walked up to the post office together, with Miss Elcock, who lived with her brother the tailor, and kept the post office and a little shop. She had just been sorting the letters, and she had got a big envelope in her hand, of strong white paper, and a twopenny stamp on it, addressed to Miss Martin. 'And do you know, Mrs. Hewitt,' says she, 'one

such as this comes regular every week, and as regular Miss Martin comes and posts another? And they are all to a man, and the same man—Mr. Soles, in some street at Bath! Do you think now, Mrs. Hewitt, that looks well for a young woman as no one knows nothing about, and is so secret in her ways?’

Mother said it looked odd, but that there might be no harm in it, and so Susan Elcock grunted; but she shook her head, and declared that she had seen a great deal of life, and so she had, for she had been in service ever so many years before her brother lost his wife and had her home to keep house for him. She never saw no good come, she said, of people that kept themselves so close; they were sure to have a reason for it; and she had her doubts of both of the Miss Martins, and chiefly of her that was always shut up and would scarcely have a word to say to any one, and then only at the door. Then Mrs. Bryce came in after some tape, and they talked it all over again. Mrs. Bryce was not so much pleased with Miss Martin as at first, both because of the refusing the invitations, and because Edith and Gertrude had to take their chance of being next to the Ruination children, who, by-the-bye, had grown quite clean and decent by this time. She agreed with the others that it did not look well; but she did say that the vicar knew all about the sisters, and was quite satisfied.

‘Yes,’ says Susan Elcock, ‘but nothing is easier than to deceive a parson or lady.’ And she went off into a long story about the way people used to take in the poor old gentleman whose cook she had been ; and they settled it in their minds that as long as a person went to church and taught in the Sunday school, nothing would persuade Mr. Hardwicke to believe anything to her discredit.

I told Frances and Rose all about it, though Frances did not seem very willing to listen, saying she was tired of the way people went on about Miss Martin ; but Rose was quite delighted. ‘Oh !’ she said, ‘is it not delicious to have a governess with a mystery ? Now I shall love her better than ever, and dear Miss Amy still more.’

Next time Rose could get us alone she told us that she was quite sure that she understood exactly how it was. She knew from her books that great ladies, real heroines, sometimes had to become humble village schoolmistresses to escape from their enemies. ‘They always have golden hair, you know,’ says Rosie, ‘and so has Miss Martin ; so of course she is a heroine.’

‘Oh,’ I said, ‘but it is just the colour of Marianne Budd’s. Is she a heroine ?’

However Rosie would have it that Marianne’s was red, though I am sure, if two locks had been put together, no one would have seen the difference.

But Rosie had plenty more to say. 'They are real noble ladies,' she said, 'most likely duchesses or countesses, or baronets—Lady Amicia and Lady Jessica, but of course they have some grander name than Martin—Mortimer, or Montgomery, or De Fitzpatrick ; the names with a De before them are always the grandest, you know. They have got a wicked uncle, who has hold of their estate, for their father, the dear young lord, was married in secret to a sweet young maiden, a violet of lowly birth, who pined in secret—"Still she said in accents fainter," and she died when her twin daughters were born.'

Here Francie cried out, for it was plain that Miss Amy was the elder by some years, not only from her stoop, which might be only from her lameness, but our governess had been heard to tell Emma Smith, when she was rough and careless with little Janie, that no one could tell how much good the kindness of an elder one might do to a little one, and that she herself knew well what it was to love and look up to her sister almost like a mother.

Rose was rather disappointed, for somehow she thought nothing so pretty as for a mother to have twin daughters and die, though when one comes to think of it any one would like to live to take care of them, and it must make a very bad time for the poor little things and them that have the

care of them. However Rose was not daunted, but went on with her story about their father, the Mortimer de Fitzpatrick, having been killed in battle, and their wicked uncle, or cousin, or something, having got all their titles and estates, and stolen their mother's marriage lines, and wanting to search them out, that he might shut them up, or poison them, or send them beyond seas, I am not sure which, for Rose changed their history with every tale she read; but I think the tyrant had once caught Lady Amicia, and thrown her down a dungeon in his castle, and that her sister had drawn her up by the help of a beetle with a bit of butter on its head and a horsehair round its leg, like the man in the dictation lesson, and that was what made her lame and bent. Now they were in hiding under a feigned name, and the fat letters to Mr. Soles were all to prove their rights; and some day a beautiful young lord, or perhaps a prince, would come in a britzska with six white horses, and restore them to their inheritance; and then we should have a great feast, like the Jubilee, or when Lady Katharine was married, and all would have hats with white ribbons, clasped with silver!

It was of no use to say that such things do not happen nowadays. Rose said they did in her books, and really they were so amusing we did not want to stop her; and it was so dull in the infant

school over the little rags of hemming and sewing in the afternoon, that she really wanted something to dream over, or she would have almost gone to sleep. And she said everything good always had a mystery in it, for Mr. Hardwicke had said so both in a sermon and when teaching us. So he had, but he meant it in a different kind of way.

She had to alter her story a little, for one morning Miss Martin's chimney was on fire. Susan Elcock, who was passing by, saw the sparks, and tapped at the door and window to tell Miss Amy. Out she came limping with her stick from the back kitchen, her arms just out of the wash-tub, and Susan vowed and declared that on her finger there was a wedding ring. Susan came in to help to throw salt on the fire and knock down the flaming soot, and cast her eyes well about the room; but though she said it was all much more genteel than ever she thought such a hovel could have been made, she saw nothing to take so much notice of as that ring. So, in spite of not liking to leave the shop to her brother and the girl, down the lane she came to tell mother of it. Nobody else had ever seen it, but then there never was much of Miss or Mrs. Amy to be seen, and when we came to think it over, some one said she had seen a thick blue enamel ring on that finger, which of course was for a guard, and to hide it.

It did not look well, mother said when she told

father at dinner ; she must be going under a false name, and it was not seemly. But father whistled, and said when folk saw through a millstone like Miss Elcock they were apt to see a good deal of odd stuff in the way, and told us not to spread nonsense about ; as if our holding our tongues could be of any use when Susan Elcock was beforehand with us !

Mrs. Dyke, we heard, declared she had always thought that Amy, whatever she was, Mrs. or Miss, had been a mother, from her ways with little Bertie and her look with the baby in her arms. Mrs. Bolton said it was plain that there was something to be ashamed of, and she was glad that she had had so little to do with either of the sisters, as if that had been out of her own clear-sightedness, instead of because they kept out of the way. And as to Rose, she was more delighted than ever, and had a fresh story at once about a private marriage with—I think it was a German prince, but perhaps it was a young duke, for he changed several times, and once he was our own young Earl of Brookfield, who would come down and own her ; but that was rather too impudent for Frances and me, and we made such an outcry that she had to drop it.

There was a great deal of whispering and guessing all round the place, and people did not always make up stories as pretty and kind as Rose Shepherd's. Then came home the two Miss

Freewards, who had been away for Miss Margaret's health all that time. They had always looked after the Sunday school when the family were from home, and seen to the clubs, and knew all about every one, till Miss Margaret was ill and they had to go to some German baths. They brought over so many pretty presents in German carving and grey wood with flowers on it! I had a blotting-book, and Rose a work-case with a bunch of her own flowers on it; and we all were very glad to see them again, and wondered what they would have to say to the Miss Martins. We made sure of knowing, for their maid, Miss Lucas, had been in service with mother, and was her great friend.

And, sure enough, Miss Lucas came and told us how horrid it was in Germany, the porters all so rude, and the servants so stupid, and with no notion how to get a cup of tea, and no proper fireplaces, but great ghastly china stoves instead; and how she would never have gone through with it, but that she did not know what would have become of poor Miss Margaret without her. Then she said that her ladies had been pleased with the appearance of the school and the orderly ways, and thought the mistress a nice, well-mannered young woman. No doubt Miss Lucas would soon entertain her at tea.

'Oh dear, no!' said mother. 'You need not expect that; she is a great deal too high for servants' company.'

Father put in rather gruffly about the lame sister, and mother said no more, only Miss Lucas said she had heard of her, and the ladies had been thinking of giving her some needlework. How would they get on with Mrs. Amy, we wondered? We heard by-and-by that they had made their call, and though they were let in and asked to sit down, they thought her very short with them. She thanked them for the offer of needlework, but she said she already had as much as she could undertake; she had poor health, and did not wish to disappoint anyone, and she had the care of the house, and helped her sister in setting the children's work. The ladies thought she seemed languid and lazy, a mere novel-reader, for they were sure she must have a great many hours on her hands, and that it would be much better for her to exert herself. They had put ever so many questions—I know exactly how they could do it—but they had not managed to find out much about her, except that she had once lived in London, and, as Miss Lucas said, 'they don't like it;' no, they don't unless they know all about everybody. Trust them, they will get to the bottom of it sooner or later, or they will never rest!





CHAPTER VI.

ROSE'S TIDINGS.

WE had our choral society's concert in November. We always have one then, because the vicar says we ought not in Advent; and we had waited till Miss Freeward came home, because she always plays the long piece at the beginning of the parts, that they call the overture. The boys would hardly be quiet through it, if it was played by any one else.

We all sang in the Huntsmen's Chorus and in the March of the Men of Harlech, and it was a most lovely concert; the best we ever had; everybody said so. Arthur and I sat together when we were not singing, and were famously jolly in a nice corner behind the door, where neither Miss Freeward, nor Miss Martin, nor anybody could see us except Francie, and she looked so prim and made such shocked faces that it was the more fun to tease her, for, as we told her, she was growing more like the Red Dragon every day.

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The great fun was to see how awfully spoony Mr. Pierce looked when he was singing 'Nil Desperandum' to Miss Martin's accompaniment, and Arthur said she made up a pussy-cat face, as if she knew nothing about it, just like Mrs. Dyke's old tabby with a dish of sprats on the table. And he nudged me to make me look at Miss Shaw, with a face as sour as verjuice. However, there was better fun still in the second part, for there had come a Mr. Edwards down from London. He had been at tea at Mr. Dyke's, and had been as grave and polite as possible, so that Arthur did not think he would do anything but just recite some long tiresome poem, or something of that sort; but no, he said he would give us Mrs. Pettitoes' tea-fight, and he was standing there the whole tea party in himself! He was Mr. Pettitoes, gruff and cross and grumbling at the house being turned upside down, and he not being able to enjoy his pipe and his slippers, but having to put his corns into his dress boots, that he hadn't worn since the mayor's banquet. Then it changed to Mrs. Pettitoes, in such a different voice, we looked to see if there wasn't a woman there, first coaxing him, and then scolding her little maid for not having run for the tea-cakes, and the little maid's voice came up squeaky and pipy. 'I've been for 'em, ma'am, but here's puss have been a-lickin' of the butter, and I'm a-tidying it up again.' Then, oh! to hear the

scolding, and then the door-bell, and 'Bless me, where's my best cap?' and the mincing voice to the company, and all their voices, one after another, as if Mr. Edwards had swallowed a houseful of people, and they were all talking inside him. And Miss Arabella Pettitoes making the tea, and her young man handing the kettle till he poured it out all wrong into an old lady's lap, and then on an old gentleman's bald head, so that they all screeched and screamed and jumped up, and so it ended. It was like hearing the real thing behind a curtain, only somehow droller, and one would have liked it to go on all night if we had not been quite sore and worn out with laughing. And were not the lads delighted? They got into a way of holloing so loud that nobody could hear anything properly afterwards.

But the odd thing was that, when we were all getting up to go away, there was Miss Martin shaking hands with Mr. Edwards, and talking away to him, as 'thick as thieves,' Arthur said, but I rebuked him for such a vulgar expression. They went on till the coachman from Overbury sent Bill Blowe in to say he would be late for the train; and then they shook hands again, while Mr. Pierce looked on as black as thunder.

Then I heard Miss Elcock say, 'Well, if that's not enough to undeceive any young man;' and Miss Lucas answer, 'No, it don't look well for a young

woman to be acquainted with a wandering mountebank fellow like that.'

They said it was a pity he had to go away so quick, as they might have found out all about her. 'All is fish as comes to her net,' says Susan Elcock.

And it was just after that there began to be a talk that Miss Martin had been seen talking to a man near Overbury station.

Overbury is about three miles from Brookfield, a good step to walk in; but there is a station at Huckster's Pool, and it only costs threepence to go in third class.

Mrs. Bolton had to go in about Bessie's boots after school one day, and saw Miss Martin, as plain as possible, under a gas lamp, talking away to a tall flashy sort of man with a pointed beard (not Mr. Edwards, who is much shorter); and when both—I mean Mrs. Bolton and Miss Martin—got out at Huckster's Pool, she asked who it was. 'My cousin,' says Miss Martin; but she coloured up, 'and we all know what that means,' says Governess Betsy.

'I didn't know you had a cousin,' Mrs. Bolton went on, and to ask if he lived at Overbury.

No, she said, he was there on business.

Then the train came up, and Mrs. Bolton was convinced that it was on purpose that she got into a different carriage, and did not walk home with

her, as would have been more comfortable and becoming for a young woman in the dark.

We thought, too, that Miss Martin looked nervous and startled in school. She gave a start as if she would jump out of her skin once, when a man, who wanted to photograph the school children, knocked at the door ; and seemed frightened even when the school officer came in suddenly. I don't believe Miss Elcock, and Miss Lucas, and Mrs. Bolton ever met together without some talk over of those meetings, and guesses about them ; and though, perhaps, there were only those two times, it seems a great many more by force of talk. Some one said the vicar ought to be told of such goings on, or Lady Mary ; but Miss Elcock said very likely he would just take no notice, it was just his way when she told him anything ; Mrs. Bolton was the right one to do it, being a married woman, and in charge as one might say ; but no, she would not be the one to speak and get a poor young thing into trouble, and my mother had no notion either of being the one to inform. We could all talk as we pleased among ourselves, and make the most of it all, but it was quite another thing to go and complain to the gentlefolks, and bring on an inquiry, which Susan said was as bad as being on oath before a lawyer, the vicar did badger one so about authorities and exactness.

However, I believe Lucas did tell her ladies all

about it, though she never said to us that she did. I think that was just after some one had seen a disreputable-looking fellow in Ruination Lane, and said at the post office that it must be the mistress's young man looking out for her; though it could not well have been, for that man turned out to be a slouching-looking poacher that my father had had his eye upon ever so long, and the one Mrs. Bolton saw was a smartly got-up sort of chap, only turned shabby. But, for all that, it got abroad that Miss Martin had had a meeting within the lanes with Harry Bates the poacher! Father said that in Brookfield a tale went round and round like a cork-screw, and got a little polished up at every turn.

The Christmas cards were to be had then, though it was only November, and Rosie and I got leave one Saturday to go in and get some, and I had some errands to do for mother, and to get some warm gloves. Rosie's father, Mr. Shepherd, had some business, and drove us in his light cart. We had finished what we had to do at the stores, and were coming out to go to meet Mr. Shepherd at the timber yard, when we saw Miss Martin come in quite out of breath, and she just went up to a counter out of sight of the door, bought a Christmas card or two, and went on through the shop.

We had only just got to the corner when a tall man in an ulster said, 'I beg your pardon, miss, but

do you know the young lady who is just gone into that shop ?'

He spoke very civilly, and Rose answered at once that it was our mistress at Brookfield Earl.

'Indeed,' he said ; ' thank you, miss ; I thought I knew her face ; and may I ask if she lives alone ?'

To which Rose answered oh no, that she lived with her sister in a little house not far from the church ; and I think she would have said more, but that mother had always warned me against talking to strange men, and I pulled her on after he had thanked her, and then I told her why.

'Oh ! but I am sure he is a gentleman,' said Rosie. 'Didn't you see his dear little black moustache ? and his studs ?'

I thought, though Rosie had not such opportunities as I had, not being a keeper's daughter, she might know a little better what a real gentleman was like, for I could not help thinking of what Governess Betsy had said about a flashy sort of man ; but she would have it that he was ever so handsome, and so grand-looking, such a height (which he was), and she made quite sure that he was the hero who had been looking for the Ladies Amicia and Jessica all along, and was coming in the britzska and six to defeat the tyrant and restore them to their rights.

She went on about it, talking so eagerly that if I had not looked out for both and guided her

along, she would have been run into by ever so many perambulators before we came to the timber yard, and as we sat on the logs waiting she went on just like a book, and I think the little rosebud of a maiden who guided the prince was to have some reward. But not a word did she say about it after we were in the cart with her father. Nor did she say anything about it to any one else afterwards—whether it was from being shy, or wishing to keep up her mystery, or having some notion afterwards that she might have done mischief, I do not know.

But a few days went on, and then in the morning Miss Martin came into school ever so pale, and with great red rings round her eyes, looking as if she had been crying all night. Mr. Hardwicke came too, for it was his morning, and took the first class, but she had the second, and I could hear that she had hardly voice to speak loud enough for the children to know what she was saying, though as the time went on and she gave her mind more to the work she got on better; but she did not go home to dinner at all, and only walked up and down the churchyard path till it was time for our lessons, and then she seemed scarcely able to keep from bursting out crying. Somehow none of us durst ask what was the matter, but by-and-by there was a whisper among the children as they came out of school that the cottage was shut

up, and no smoke out of the chimney, and that the sister at home was gone!

Gone the day before. It turned out that Mr. Elcock himself had seen a tall man in an ulster, and a lame young woman walking up to the station in time for the 2.42 train, but he knew so little of Amy Martin by sight that he never suspected who it was till it was all over the place that she had run away.

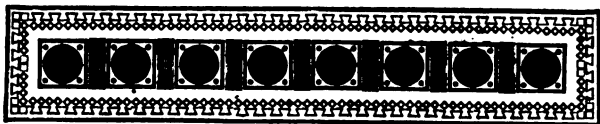
Miss Martin tried to put a good face on it, poor thing. After school was over in the evening she went to Mrs. Bolton, and told her straight out that she could not help being rather upset that day, for her sister's husband had come for her suddenly, and she had gone away with him.

'A married woman after all! But why did she never go by his name?'

'She did; he is our cousin, Frederick Martin.'

That was all they would let us hear. Governess Betsy came and shut the door behind her, and told Frances to go down and light Miss Martin's fire, and put on the kettle.





CHAPTER VII.

JESSIE MARTIN'S PRIVATE LOG-BOOK—ARRIVAL.

BROOKFIELD EARL: *September 9.*—My Saturday log-book was a great comfort and real help to me at Pirlee, when I lived alone and had no one to talk to in the evenings ; and though I neglected it in those later days, I mean to keep it up thoroughly well here, as I cannot discuss everything with my poor Amy ; and though first impressions are often not to be trusted, I have found, even in my short experience, that it is useful to be able to refer to them. We have been here for eight days, but as we arrived on Friday quite late, I was much too busy on Saturday to write anything.

This is a mere cottage, smaller and rougher than I had quite expected, though Mr. Hardwicke had told me it was only two rooms and a back kitchen, and the furniture very plain and scanty. I was shocked at first at the notion of Amy living in such a place, but, poor dear, she declared it was a

paradise compared with some of the rooms she has had to put up with, for it was thoroughly clean, and fresh, and sweet when we arrived, with a bright fire, a kettle beside it, everything ready for tea, and even a kitten in a basket.

After all, I believe nothing could really be so good for my sister as that there should be so much to contrive and to do. If she had walked into a house with everything in full order, she could only have sat down to fret over the past ; but she has always looked on me as the little sister she had to take care of, and though I am now the strong, able one of the two, and the bread-winner, she has the same longing, dear soul, to make everything nice and comfortable for me. Nor am I afraid for her strength, for the doctor assured me, when I brought her from the Convalescent Home at Weston, that nothing would be so good for her, body and mind, as household occupation and exercise. A larger house might be too much for her, but this is just enough for her ; and it is astonishing to see the difference her clever fingers have made in this little place, which seemed so rough and bare at first, now that we have unpacked so many of the dear old things, which happily were in Mr. Soles' charge and are mine, so that Fred could not make away with them. She takes interest too in contriving nice little dinners for me, and really her spirits are better than I dared to hope, though

she is very sad sometimes, and shrinks from being seen by any one. I cannot wonder, nor do anything to press her, when I see how sadly she is changed, and recollect how lovely she was, and think of all she has gone through. I wish much I could persuade her to see a few people and have a little change; it would be so good for her spirits. She will not even hear of my having the pupil-teachers to do their lessons here, though it would be better for us all, and make a variety for her; but she said that if I brought a set of gossiping girls in upon her she could not bear it. I am glad there is a late evening service as well as early morning Communion, for the church is not too far off for her to walk there with my arm, and she will venture it in the dark, or when there are few people.

But I meant to write about the church. It is a little old church, covered with ivy, and beautiful inside, though of course not equal to Pirlee or to the Abbey. Mr. Hardwicke preached such a comforting sermon that I did wish Amy could have heard it. I like him very much, and so does Amy, for she has let him talk to her. Mr. Dyke, the schoolmaster, says he interferes too much, and does not like his coming alternately to the two schools for their lesson on religious subjects. Mr. Dyke thinks his own lessons teach much more than those of any one not trained can do, and declares that *his* subjects were the only ones that

got any credit from the diocesan inspector. I do not think he is right—surely we do not *only* teach those subjects to get good marks for our classes ; and from what I have overheard of the vicar's lessons, they may touch the soul and train the life in ways that merely facts and knowledge such as tell in an inspection never can.

It is true, however, that technical teaching and system have been very much wanting here, though every one (except Mr. Dyke) is never tired of telling me what an excellent woman the late mistress was. He says, ' Just the old-fashioned dame, Miss Martin, tolerated out of favour to my Lady Brookfield.' She must have been more than that, however, judging by what her best scholars know. Her grave is covered with fresh flowers; and I should like to think that I shall be as much loved and respected as she must have been.

The school and parish are in two great divisions. There are about thirty girls belonging to the original inhabitants, mostly dependants of the estate, all beautifully neat and trim, plump and healthy, and in general rather prim and stolid, and with a notion that nobody ever knew as well as themselves, because they are at her ladyship's school, but altogether good orderly children enough. There are nearly forty more from the potteries by Huckster's Pool station, new-comers to the place from all parts, whom it is the custom

to look down upon and call 'the Ruination lot,' from the old name of the field where the potteries are. I shall try to put an end to that title, which is enough to drag them down. I have entered their residence in the register as Huckster's Pool, and the vicar said he was glad to see that I had done so. Some of them are very wild and rough-looking, with heads and hands that are not pleasant to look at, and a good many rags of dirty finery. I see by the register that they have attended very irregularly, but this week they have come pretty well, owing perhaps to novelty. It cannot be pleasant to them to be treated so much as outcasts; the others edge themselves away from them on the forms, and will not let them join in their games, and I must say there is some excuse.

I once read somewhere that the great head master, Dr. Arnold, advised a gentleman who was going to be head master at another public school to wait a year before he made any great change. A year would be too long, but I have waited a week before doing anything I can help, though I have seen much that my fingers tingle to set to rights—droning and drawling in school, rushing out as a lawless rabble, rudeness on the part of one set, scorn on that of the other, and dreadful singing.

Mrs. Bolton, the infants' mistress, takes all this as a matter of course, and seems quite offended if

I show my disapproval. Indeed, I might have been more careful, as she is daughter to the late mistress. 'Quite behind the world,' says Mr. Dyke, 'only kept on out of charity.' She is a very homely body, with no training, only working under her mother ; but, as she is a widow, she has nothing else except this school to depend on for herself and her two children. She could hardly work anywhere else, and perhaps I might help her in time to improve her method, and sit for a certificate ; but I am afraid she was rather huffed because I declined drinking tea with her. I know Amy would not hear of coming, and I cannot leave her to herself all the evening. She likes to hear of the children, and to help me set their work, and Mr. Soles has promised to send her some embroidery to do, which is very kind in him, but he will never forget how long and how well poor father worked for him.

Three pupil-teachers are a good many for a little school such as this, but I believe one was added to help poor Mrs. Pearson with the increased numbers. One, Rose Shepherd, is entirely in the infant school, but of course has to study with me, as Mrs. Bolton is not certificated. Rose is a merry little plump, idle thing, who does not seem likely to pass, judging from the present quality of her work. Indeed, I cannot think how she passed before, as she must have done ; but I fancy she is one of those

girls whose powers come out under the stimulus of excitement ; and, after all, it was only the fifth standard.

Frances Best is an orphan, boarded with Mrs. Bolton. She gives me the notion of being a steady, well-principled, dutiful girl, but not clever, and not qualified by nature for a teacher—indeed, only made one because it was the most convenient thing to do with her. Her performances are very poor, and she dawdles over her class, and lets them dawdle so that I can hardly keep off them according to my resolution ; and when I reminded her of the time-table, she said, ‘Oh, we never can keep sharp to that!’ I am afraid there is a struggle to come, and I hope I shall keep well in mind our kind chaplain’s last lecture to us about the sisters three needed in education—faith, hope, and patience, all backed by prayer. I felt the truth of it even at Pirlee, where I stepped into a well-disciplined school. They are all the more needed here.

Bertha Hewitt is by far the cleverest of the pupil-teachers, as well as the handsomest, and she knows it. She has bright dark eyes, a high colour, good features, and hair curling about her forehead as much as the rules of the place will permit ; and they must have been very strict, for there is hardly a flower or a feather among the old Brookfield set ; and certainly they are a pleasant contrast to the Huckster’s Pool girls, with their battered stumps of

feathers, ragged flowers, and dirty old tennis aprons. I fancy Miss Bertha is as dressy as she dares to be, but she does her lessons much the best, and has some idea of teaching and of keeping order, though I was obliged to interfere with her for striking a child—not hard, but blows must not be suffered. She did not take rebuke at all well, declared that it was necessary : ‘Governess always struck, and permitted the teachers to do so;’ and Frances took her part, as well as Mrs. Bolton, who declares that nothing but ‘the stick will serve with the Ruination lot.’

She may be right. I know there are lawless children who will defy authority if they think there is no power to beat them ; and there are offences, chiefly those of young children against propriety or humanity, better met with a slight prompt blow than by words ; but at any rate I am resolved that no one shall strike a blow except myself, and not without grave cause.

By way of being able to judge of these three girls’ amount of understanding and attainment, I desired them to write out for me the paraphrase of any poem they might choose which they had learnt. This is their production.

‘There was a lady named Rosabelle. She was staying with some friends, and she would go home across the sea, though she was warned that it would be dangerous, because her mother would be lonely,

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and her father wanted her to pour out his wine ; and besides, there was a great ball, and a gentleman she liked was to ride and give her a ring. But she was drowned and not buried like the rest of her family. There were said to be strange signs and dreams, but of course they were not true. A firth is a narrow bay or broad estuary in Scotland : an inch is a small island. A sprite is the contraction of a spirit.'

There Bertha gave up her composition to me—unfinished, I suppose. Next I looked at—

'Once upon a time there was a beautiful young lady named Rosabelle in a castle. And her true love, whose name was Lord Lindsay, was to dance with her and give her a gold ring ; and she longed much to go home ; and the water-spirit screamed, and the old man saw a wet shroud swathed round a maiden fair, and there was a great light, and there was a storm, and the sea holds lovely Rosabelle ; and Lindsay leapt in to save her, and he was drowned dead ; and the chapel is all on fire whenever one of the lordly line is going to die, and the sea holds lovely Rosabelle.'

Bertha says that Rose chose the poem for them all, because she likes Rosabelle, and would like to write her name so.

Here is Frances's performance :—

'O hear and hearken, vain gentlewomen. I narrate no proud deed of weapons. Gentle is the

little letter, and sorrowful it lies down, that laments the pretty Rosabelle——

‘Fasten up your canal boat, brave sailors, and, mild gentlewoman, vouchsafe to remain reposed in Castle Ravensheugh, and do not try to make sin the tempestuous estuary to-day. The dark billows are bordered with foam, three barley-corns to a big stone, the sea-cat springs with a cry——’

There I called for poor Frances’s work before she had done any more ! I do feel obliged to her after all, for Amy could not help giving the first laugh I have heard since we met again over the mild gentlewoman, and this version of

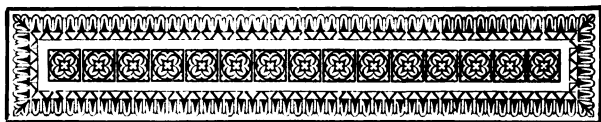
The blackening wave is edged with foam,
To inch and rock the sea-mews fly.

I could not imagine where Frances had found her cat till Amy reminded me of the sea-mew.

It is clear that if Bertha has the most ability, Frances’s memory is the most exact, and Rose must have some fancy, or she would not have drowned poor Lord Lindsay too. How shall I get on with them ?

Of one thing I am very glad : the religious knowledge of all the old scholars is far in advance of their other attainments ; and though it is somewhat by rote and wanting in intelligence, they have evidently been trained in reverential habits.

May I only keep this up, and not fail in what our chaplain calls the higher mission of a school-mistress !



CHAPTER VIII.

LOG-BOOK—CONQUEST.

SEPTEMBER 16.—I am glad it is Saturday. Amy does not wish me to sit down and write, saying I am tired enough ; but she will not let me help her with her Sunday pie, and I should like to tell how I have got on.

First I had to see Mrs. Bolton, and ask her to arrange with me the time I should give to the infants. She did not like it, but I showed her the rule that, as she is not certificated, the head teacher must give some time in every week to the little ones. She grumbled, and said the gentlemen and their rules were enough to drive one off one's head if one was to be always worriting about them ; but she ended by allowing that poor mother was always in and out, and latterly had let her see to the needlework in the afternoon, having younger eyes. So I have settled that on two afternoons in the week we shall change places for an hour, as Mrs.

Bolton is really an excellent needlewoman, and Frances's work is exquisite. I give the little things some kindergarten exercises and songs with action, and they seem to be brightened and pleased ; but the humming and buzzing I had stopped at other times begins the instant I leave the upper school, and I find girls standing about and lolling in a manner I never allow for a moment. Discipline will never be what it ought to be while this goes on, and my strictness will be contrasted with her good-nature.

However, my rules are observed, though they seemed to astonish the children very much ; and Bertha told me so often that Governess never required such and such a thing, that I am afraid I lost my temper, and told her that 'Governess' was never to be brought up to me again ; upon which Frances began to cry, and I tried to explain how far I was from feeling any disrespect, only that every one had different methods. The vicar seems satisfied, which is a comfort.

I had two or three battles : one with a Huckster's Pool child, who was eating sweets in class and howled when they were taken from her till I overcame her ; and another with a certain Kate Thomson, a Brookfield child, who refused to call Salisbury, Saulsbury. I did not know what I was bringing on myself when I corrected her, and certainly the spelling was in her favour when she

drew down her black brows and deliberately repeated 'Sa-lis-bury.' On my next attempt, the head girl, Annie Knowles, observed, 'Please, ma'am, no one can do anything with Kate Thomson when she is like that—not her mother, nor nobody.'

I saw Bertha and Frances looking up from their classes, and everybody's head raised to see the pitched battle between Kate and me, and I remembered the rule I had heard, never absolutely to try to force a sulky child to do what it is impossible to make her do ; so I only made each of the children below her in the class say the capital of Wiltshire, and go above her.

She would not stir, and I had to make all the seven girls below her move above her while she stood like a stock.

I took no notice of her, but finished the lesson with the others ; and, as it was dinner-time, dismissed them, keeping her a few moments to argue with her that, in spite of the spelling, no one would understand a person who persisted in calling it Sa-lis-bury, and that it was foolish and disobedient to stand out. She would not utter a word, and I doubt if she heard me, so I told her to go home, and said I hoped to see her wiser. I think she was rather surprised, and the pupil-teachers, as soon as she was gone, regaled me with stories of her obstinacy : how mother had deprived her of meals and her father had beaten her in vain ; how Mrs. Pear-



A TROUBLESOME CHILD.

son had kept her a whole day in a cupboard, and above all how Miss Freeward had actually stayed all one Sunday morning through church-time with her trying to make her say her collect right. And she seemed never yet to have been conquered ; she has always tired people out, and no doubt is proud of it.

So I thought the best line would be only to say to the girls that she was a very foolish child, but I had heard of many like her, so as to lessen the wonder and excitement ; and afterwards I let things go on just as usual. She is rather an intelligent girl, and has caught the first attempts at mental arithmetic quicker than most people, and the next day she mounted to the head of the class. Then I gave a lesson in geography in which the word occurred, and in the excitement of answering questions and keeping her place she actually called 'Salisbury' quite right. Everybody grinned, and I could not help saying, 'Well done, Kate.' Afterwards in the recess I talked to her a little, with great fear lest I should bring on the sullen fit again by being thought to scold ; so I told her that I had not meant to trick her into saying Salisbury, but I wished she had done so at first, as it would have been better for all.

'It is my temper, ma'am,' said she. 'Mother says she never saw no one with such a temper.'

She seemed quite proud of it, and surprised

when I said it was a very sad thing ; and then I reminded her how the Israelites were blamed for being stiff-necked, and Pharaoh for hardening his heart. It seemed rather to shock her ; however, she said, ' One can't help one's temper.'

I told her we could, and begged her to say within herself, ' O Lord, bend my will,' whenever she felt the stubborn mood coming on. I do not know whether she will try, or if the mood will let her, poor child ; but I do believe there is a great deal of good in her, and her whole appearance shows that she belongs to a nice family, and I have marked her initials down that I may not forget her when I pray for my scholars.

Another thing I have been trying is to get the Huckster children neater by making them wash their hands and faces, and tidy their hair with an old comb that Amy found for me ; and I have set them to mend and patch the rags in their dress—no easy matter ; but I have helped them a good deal, and it is capital practice.

Yet these are the thanks I get. I went to Huckster's Pool this morning to get some tape and buttons, for there are more shops there than in Brookfield, and suddenly a woman bounced out of one of the red houses in Paradise Row with ' Be you the governess ? Then I'll thank you not to be meddling with my child's hair nor her clothes ; I can do what I thinks fit myself.'

‘Then I hope you will,’ I said. ‘I should be very thankful to see her looking nice.’

‘That’s no business of yours,’ she said.

‘Indeed,’ I answered, ‘I always thought it part of my duty to train my pupils in clean and tidy habits.’

‘Well, I don’t want no fiddle-faddling, nor patching as don’t match!’

And she banged the door and left me, glad it was over! I hope I did not seem frightened, or I shall have no peace, and I do not mean to worry Mr. Hardwicke whenever a mother flies at me. After all, as Amy says, one should remember that they are apt to feel rather sore at being obliged to send their children to school without any choice in the matter. Perhaps they may learn to trust me and grow friendly in time.

Yet really the people who are friendly are almost worse than those who are not. Is every place as inquisitive as this, I wonder? First there was the young person at the drapery shop wanted to know how I liked the place, and what I thought of the sermon last Sunday, and if I was used to town or country, and if I had ever kept school before; till I was so tired of it that I had very nearly gone off without my change.

Then when I went to the butcher’s for a bit of meat, Mrs. Bryce must needs come out as civil as may be, but she had her catechism too. I have

her two little step-daughters, and I think she wanted to know whether I was genteel enough to teach them, for she inquired whether I played the piano, and if I could give them lessons at extra times ; and she asked where I had learnt, and who had taught me, and what my style was, with an evident desire to give me a sense of her accomplishments, also to make me feel myself honoured by the attendance of the Miss Bryces at my school, and to show me that it depends not merely on their progress but on the proper respect that I may pay them, and which they certainly will not receive, for I am not going to make distinctions between my scholars.

Mrs. Bryce, however, talked too much to want much answer from me. And she was nothing to the postmistress, thin and sharp-nosed, and curious to the last degree as to what I could possibly want a twopenny stamp for. All the catechism at the drapery shop was gone through again, and whether my sister was older or younger, had she always lived with me, had my friends been in business ; till I felt that something was coming that I knew not how to answer, and I gave her a hasty good-morning and fled out of her shop. Why cannot people let one alone ?

The next person I fell in with was Mr. Dyke, the schoolmaster, walking home from the station with a parcel of books from the library at Overbury, which he says is a very good one.

I have not seen Mrs. Dyke yet. Her baby was born only two days after we came, but Amy has made acquaintance with the elder child, a dear little fellow of about two years old, whom she heard crying in the road and brought in. She really seems to take pleasure in petting and playing with him when he toddles up to the gate. It is quite a blessing that he should be a comfort and delight to her, when it would have seemed as if it might be quite the other way, and that she would shrink from the sight of a little child even more than she does from that of a grown person.

However, Mr. Dyke began by thanking me for my sister's kindness to little Bertie, and then he began to talk about the choral society which it seems they have here, and which gives a concert or two every winter, hoping that we would join in it. I said I did not think I should be of any use, for, though I have ear and knowledge enough to teach the children with the help of the harmonium, my voice is too thin and weak for public singing. If he could have heard Amy in former times, he would not have let us off so easily; but of course I gave no such hint—indeed, it is scarcely likely that she will ever sing again, even if she have any voice left, which I doubt.

Mr. Dyke was very polite, wanting to carry my basket, and, when I asked about the subscription to the library whence his books came, offering to arrange for me and change the books. There is a

village lending library here, but, as he said, the choice is a good deal restricted, and I am afraid the children's little stories and improving books would not interest Amy. The subscription is chiefly for her sake, so that Mr. Dyke may think his compliment thrown away when he rejoiced in having acquired a neighbour with intellectual tastes.

Poor man ! he evidently thinks himself wasted down here, out of the reach of all society except when he can walk into Overbury ; and, as he says, he is looked down upon by all the uneducated, dull old farmers and village tradesmen. Never, he says, will he be tempted into a model parish again, to be dragooned by parsons and ladies, and made a Sunday hack !

I could not fully make out what he meant, for it seems that he made the engagement to be organist and choirmaster, and that he is only occasionally wanted to help in the Sunday school ; but it seems that he does not like any criticism of his choice of tunes, and that he resents Mr. Hardwicke's being present at the practices and rebuking the boys for any want of reverence. The last and worst grievance seemed to be that the vicar had insisted on punishing some boys who were playing at marbles on a flat tombstone in the churchyard, an offence which he considered to be out of school, and therefore not to be noticed.

When I said that I thought the great object of all we did was to make the children good, and that one might be thankful for any supporting influence, he shrugged up a shoulder and said that was the old theory, but that he did not believe in the schoolmaster being the satellite of the clergyman 'Let each keep to his own work.'

'The work of each is the training of the children,' I said.

'Let him mind the souls, and me mind their intellects.'

'But how are their souls to be got at except through their intellects? I should think nothing worse for them than to let them detect any difference between the master and clergyman.'

He laughed, and said he knew better than to do so, and that I must remember that all he had said was in confidence. So, of course, I promised not to mention this; nor shall even Amy hear, for she always hated arguments, and thought them disputes. He said good-humouredly that he might have known that the lady's view was always with the parson, but that for his part, and that of all thinking men, 'religion was one thing, instruction another.'

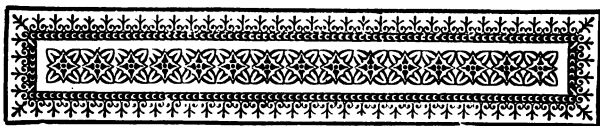
'And I have been taught,' was my answer, 'that religion running through all instruction and training makes education.'

'So have I,' he said, with an odd air as if he

thought he had outgrown it. 'But I do not wish to disturb you, Miss Martin. No doubt you and the vicar will get on happily enough, but see what you say to influence when the Miss Freewards come home.'

What can they be like? Is it his prejudice? If they are meddlesome I hope they will be satisfied with the school, and let Amy alone.





CHAPTER IX.

LOG-BOOK—CHORAL PRACTICE.

SEPTEMBER 23.—There will be no escaping the choral society after all. Mr. Hardwicke came and made a point of it, saying that there are a good many giddy young things among the members, and that while the Miss Freewards are away he wants to have some steady person to be a check on them.

I can quite believe it, but at my age is it possible for me to be a check? and will not trying it make them like me all the worse? However, that is not the point; one can only do one's duty, and take the chance—or rather, put it into God's hands. It has been a stormy week altogether. A Huckster's Pool woman came to fetch home a child who was kept in, but she was soon tamed, and went away rather pleased than otherwise. Two more have come up after hours to abuse me because I have punished their children: one, a great girl to whom I gave a touch of the cane after school for

bullying a poor little weakly one, and taking away her dinner ; and the other whom I punished with a double lesson for stealing a slate pencil. This last woman was reasonable, and assured me that she should give Janie 'a good warming' as soon as she came home, which was more than I desired, though it may be well to impress on her the greatness of the offence. The other, Mrs. Lock, would not believe me, was very violent, so as quite to frighten Amy, and went off to the vicar. He came the next morning and made a regular investigation, which ended of course in his understanding the matter, and giving a very severe reproof to Lizzie Lock, and also, as I understand, to her mother. They are a very rough family, and the brothers have set on the other boys to shout at my unlucky hair as I walk along the street. Mr. Dyke heard them, and was very angry, wanting to punish them, but I laughed at him, and told him it was against his principles to punish for offences out of school.

Some of the Huckster children are already quite clean and neat, so I have made it a reward to them to come and join in the games I have been teaching in the recess time, but this gives offence in the other quarter. Alice Wright and her sister actually slipped out of the game, and one of the mothers has been remonstrating with me, though she was silenced when I said I had ascertained that the child was clean, and being there myself, I

prevented any bad words, but I doubt whether she was convinced. Mrs. Bryce, too, is displeased that I do not keep Edith and Gertrude sitting on a form apart, and talked about the Overbury seminary last time I went to the shop. However, the butcher came out and said, 'No, no, missus, I'll have no nonsense. Treat my maids just as you would the rest, Miss Martin; I don't want them to give themselves no airs.'

That is at least a comfort, but I have greatly affronted Mrs. Bolton by offering to lend her a book on the kindergarten system, and to show her some of the exercises. She says she has always given satisfaction to her ladyship and Lady Mary, and has worked as her poor dear mother always did, and she has no opinion of new methods. Play instead of work, that's not her notion; making children idle.

Amy says I began about it too soon, and I know I am always hasty; but I am sorry to have done anything to set her more against me, for it is a pity not to work together. Besides, this homely infant school will drag down the merit grant.

Another trouble is with the pupil-teachers. When I took my hour in the infant school last Monday, Rose Shepherd in great haste tucked a book into her apron pocket. I told her that the school hours were not the time for learning her lessons, on which her plump cheeks coloured ten

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times deeper, and as she moved the book fell out of the pocket. It was a foolish cheap novel. 'Oh, Rose!' I said, 'I did not think you would have done this.' She began to cry, and said it was a book that her brother sent her. To which I answered that she must know that it was not right to amuse herself in lesson-time. I would not say more before the little ones, and she managed not to let me get her alone for the next two days; but on Thursday, when I had to run home to fetch a book before their lesson, I found them all three reading 'Bootles' Baby' together, to beguile the time. I know it is not a bad book; I found it among Amy's things, and was diverted by it; but if they read such things they will read worse, so I gave them all a talking to, on the folly and temptation and mischief of idle reading, and told them how they might help themselves on by reading the improving books in the library; but they only looked very cross in their different ways—Bertha as if she would be saucy and defiant if she dared; Frances dull and sullen; and Rose half crying, half angry.

Amy says it is hard on the poor things to expect them to read for improvement when they have been hard at work all day, and reminds me that I like a story as well as any one. Well, that's true, but it should not be one of that silly exciting kind that are only too cheap; and I liked to read travels, and histories too, when I was getting up a subject,

and could talk them over with the other teachers. It is a pity that the library books here are either very simple village tales or rather dry. Mr. Dyke quite made a face over them when I was looking for something to interest Amy.

Mr. Dyke is put out at the school going to church on saints' days, though, as they do so instead of the Scripture lesson, no time is lost, and I do not see why he should complain. The boys do not behave well at church, and I am afraid I saw nods and smiles passing between Bertha and their pupil-teacher, Arthur Norton. He is an Overbury boy, and is not here on Sunday, but lodges here in the week and comes up the same lane with Bertha. Amy sees them from her window, and says they come nearer romping than is well between a boy and girl of at least fifteen years of age.

September 30.—I like Mrs. Dyke. She is a gentle, quiet little woman, too much wrapped up in her children to be afflicted with as much curiosity as her neighbours; and I rather hope that Amy may take to her and her little baby, whom she brought in to show us when inviting us to the christening on Michaelmas Day and the tea afterwards. I could see that holding the little thing was a painful pleasure to my poor sister, but nothing would induce her to accept the invitation. It was just as well, for the good folk asked more questions than ever, and an innocent joke of Mr.

Dyke's brought us nearer to a quarrel with Mrs. Bolton than ever before.

Perhaps, however, her presence might have been a restraint, as she is older and gentler than I am. They certainly could not have ventured to ask the cause of her lameness, nor put me to so much difficulty as to speaking truth without telling what she shrinks from having known ; though I see the vicar thinks it a mistake, when there is no blame attached to her, poor dear.

The pupil-teachers were sillier than ever, and Mrs. Bolton fell upon poor Frances, who was really the quietest of the three. I let it alone till this morning, when I went to the lodge to speak to Bertha before her mother, but it was of very little use. Mrs. Hewitt was foolish enough to defend her, and say that it was nonsense to make a fuss about a little play between young people ; so I have only made another enemy.

No, I wish I had not written that, for it puts me in mind of how poor Emma Black was always fancying enemies, and how silly we thought her, and how stupidly miserable she made herself. Amy says mothers always do stand up for their children, but that it does not follow that they do not scold the children well afterwards. And I fancy that is quite true, and I hope I have done my duty, though perhaps it might have been better done.

October 7.—The first meeting of the choral society is over. Several of the men of the choir, eight or ten young women who have voices, or think they have, Mr. Dyke, the pupil-teachers, and myself; with Mr. Hardwicke, who is not particularly musical, acting as president. Miss Warne, from one of the farms, made some wonderful runs on the piano, and thumped it vehemently, which it seems is thought the thing here. But Mr. Dyke begged that I would accompany him in 'The Village Blacksmith;' and then Mr. Pierce, the tall young exciseman, begged that I would do the same by him if I could play the accompaniment to 'Nil Desperandum,' which of course I could; but I rather wished I had not, for Miss Warne pouted; and I tried all I could to get out of having to learn and practise anything new with him, but Mr. Hardwicke himself requested me; and Mr. Dyke told me afterwards that Miss Warne will not attend to anything but the effects she produces, and always puts out any one whom she accompanies.

I am only to sing in the choruses, for we are to have the Huntsmen's Chorus, and the March of the Men of Harlech at our Christmas concert.

But I was very much startled when Mr. Pierce turned round on me, and declared that he knew I could favour them, for he had heard the sweetest strains proceeding from my cottage window, and

had stood entranced to listen. 'When and what was it?' I asked. 'It was at about four o'clock two or three days ago, and it was a hymn.'

Of course it was Amy singing to little Herbert Dyke, for I am always in school with the three teachers till five. So she has found her voice for him, though she has never let me guess it. I was obliged to own that it was my sister singing, and at once he and most of the men present began to press me to induce her to join the society and sing at the concert; but I could not help observing that not one of our own sex requested it. Is it jealousy, or is it any suspicion? I declared that it was impossible and useless to ask her, and Mr. Hardwicke came to my help, saying that he knew Miss Martin's sister was not in health to come out in the evening or sing in public.

I have not told her of the request, nor even that she was heard, for it would only frighten her and prevent her from ever singing again, and I am so glad that she is beginning. I am sure the quiet and occupation here are doing much for her health and spirits; she moves more easily, looks better, and altogether seems to be recovering from the shock.

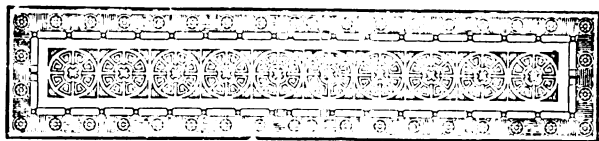
Of one person she has quite made a conquest, namely, of little Rose Shepherd, whom she was obliged to ask into the house during a thunderstorm, and made very happy. The next morning

the child brought a bunch of fuchsias and late roses for her, and really has been another creature with me ever since, ceasing to follow Bertha's lead in opposition, brightening up with welcome when I come into the infant school, and altogether making herself pleasant, though I think it is more for Amy's sake than mine.

She is an idle little being too, and it is very hard to get her to pay attention to anything she thinks dry. Her sums are wretched work, but she is beginning to perceive that there are romantic stories in history, and she says with clasped hands and an affected manner that she adores poetry.

She can say all the verses in the school readers, and is a little index to the places where each passage is to be found ; but I very much doubt whether her grammar, needlework, or arithmetic will pass. Frances, with not half the ability, has plodded on far before her, and always does what she is told, though not always agreeably.

[NOTE.—There are very full comments on the character and progress of the individual scholars, and the mode of dealing with them ; but these are omitted, as, though they show Jessie Martin's conscientious work, they might be wearisome to the reader.]



CHAPTER X.

LOG-BOOK—OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

OCTOBER 14.—The first concert is to be on November 15th, so as to be over before Advent, and in the meantime we meet every Thursday evening for practice. The children have been very good this week, and seem to understand their standard work better, but it is very hard to get them out of the old dame-school habit of shouting out each word as they read, without any expression. I doubt whether the elder set ever will be cured, and I am afraid each fresh relay from the infants will bring in the practice afresh and have to be broken of it. However, I am in much better spirits about the inspection next spring. The report cannot well be much worse than the last.

October 28.—I missed last Saturday, for I had nothing particular to say, except what seemed too foolish to mention, that Mr. Pierce *would* walk home with me, and was altogether more attentive

than was comfortable. He is a nice, respectable, well-mannered young man enough, and even Mr. Dyke thinks him sufficiently intellectual to be tolerable society, but I am not going to attend to anything of that sort while Amy depends on me. I do not think a schoolmistress ought even to think of marriage under five-and-twenty, so as to waste all her training and education; and I do not believe I shall wish to marry even then, while I have my dear sweet sister to need me and make a home for me. I cannot fancy caring for a man half as much as I do for her, and he would be so much in the way in my work. Besides, if I did, it would certainly not be Mr. Pierce, though there is no harm in him: he is a very good, religious young man, regular at church twice on Sunday, and a communicant, and he is quite superior-looking. I got rid of him the day before yesterday by keeping Frances with me in walking home, but to-day I had to go to Overbury to change the books at the library, and choose some that will interest Amy. Just as I turned into the lane from the station in coming home I heard a bicycle coming swish behind me, and there was Mr. Pierce jumping off it, walking along with it, wanting to carry my books, and at last, before I could shake him off, asking permission to pay his addresses to me.

I told him that I begged he would do no such thing; and then he said that he knew he could not

expect me to like him on so short an acquaintance, but what he wished was to be allowed to endeavour to recommend himself to me—all in the handsomest and properest manner.

But I told him plainly that anything of the kind was out of the question, that my sister had had great troubles, and that I had resolved to devote my life to her and to my profession, and that to pay his attentions to me would be the greatest injury he could possibly do me. He said he would be very discreet and guarded, and would be willing to wait any time; he even talked of providing for my sister, and her sharing my home when he gets promotion. But I told him to put all that out of his head, that there were reasons which I could not tell him; and I implored him to let me alone, for he can do me nothing but harm here in this gossiping place, and I am entirely resolved against marriage. I know that entertaining any such thought is unsettling, and interferes with one's attention to one's duties, and I am determined not to admit it. I hope I made him believe me at last, and that he will not take it much to heart, poor young man. I had just come to the stile, and I was going to plod across the muddy ploughed fields by the path, as he could not follow me there with his bicycle, when he said, 'No, no, Miss Martin, I will not drive you to that!' and with a sort of good-bye he got upon his machine again,

but was scarcely off before Miss Warne turned the corner of the road, driving her mother in a dog-cart, and I thought they looked very hard at me.

I have said nothing to Amy; she would immediately call herself a burthen, and think I had refused a good offer on her account, when it is not so. She is an additional reason, but I am not going to marry or engage myself after only two years' work, nor have I seen such a happy specimen of wedlock as to be in haste to undertake it. I found, however, that I must write it all down, as I could not talk it out, so as to get it off my mind. I hope God will bless my decision, for I think it is the right one in my position.

November 4.—The choral meeting went off very well, and there was nothing to attract notice. Indeed, people are more taken up with the return of the Miss Freewards, who came back last Wednesday. They have, it seems, always taken great interest in the parish, working with and under the great ladies at the Park, and now supplying their place. Down they came to school the very first day, and had a long talk with Mrs. Bolton, their old friend in the infant school, while my children became more and more excited, and could scarcely do their knitting; and no sooner did the door begin to open than there was a jumping up, before I could give the signal, and a curtseying and smiling all over the place. The ladies spoke

civilly to me, and then went from child to child, greeting all the Brookfield ones in turn, and asking after this one's grandmother and that one's bad finger, as if they were delighted to be among them again, and cared for every one here.

They seem to be about forty years old, and they both have nice, kind, good faces, so much alike—in face, figure, and dress—that I asked Bertha afterwards how I was ever to know them apart. She said Miss Freeward was the uprightest, and had the most colour, and always was—as she expressed it—the foreman of the two; and Miss Margaret had the quietest way. I could see little difference. They noticed that the Huckster children were neater, and then they asked more questions than any inspector does. They looked at all the needlework, and praised or blamed as they thought fit, and had an immense deal to say about heels of stockings. Of course it disturbed the regular work a good deal to have them standing talking away there, and then they wanted the children to sing. It was not far from breaking-up time, so that I did not mind beginning a little sooner, but I hope such interruptions are not to happen often. However, this was the first day, and I can see that the children are really fond of them. Nothing is so good for the manners and character as a nice lady's influence, so I will not grumble.

November 11.—The ladies do haunt the school a good deal. Both teach on Sundays, and I have only to take the lowest class, and on Tuesday Miss Freeward questions the first class on the Catechism. They are not very orderly with her, and fall into the slouching, whispering, fidgeting ways I hoped I had cured them of ; and it worries me, though Amy laughs at me for minding, and says if I keep a tight hand at other times it cannot hurt.

Then scarcely a day passes without one or other popping in to send a message by some child, or to desire one to call for broth or jelly or something. I do not object so much in the afternoon, as it encourages the children to have their needlework looked at, but it is a great interruption during lesson-time for them to be standing about, stooping over the copy-books, and listening to the reading, or even telling me that such or such a girl has too hard a sum. If Miss Freeward were not a school manager here I think I would speak to Mr. Hardwicke about it. Yet, after all, their coming seems to make the children better mannered ; Bertha puts aside her pert look, and Frances is brighter, so I suppose they do good ; but it is odd when they instruct and advise me, as if I had never seen a school before.

I only wish they would let Amy alone. I found her quite in a flutter, for she had had a long visit from both of them, and they had gone on just as the district ladies do at the poor women, asking all

manner of questions, wanting to come and read to her, and to set her to do plain work for them. They seemed quite displeased when she declined, saying that she had employment. There was a bit of her embroidery lying on her book; it was 'A Noble Life;' and Amy says she hardly knew which they seemed to think the worst waste of time—idle reading, as they called it, or fancy work; for she was a great deal too much hurt and too angry in her quiet way to tell them that she worked for payment. She was so much upset that she cried, and had a bad headache all the evening. I don't see what business they had to meddle with her occupations any more than she has with theirs, and I believe I was very short with Miss Freeward when she began to lecture me about rousing my sister to useful employments, and not letting her mope and fancy herself an invalid. Much does the lady know about Amy and her troubles, or what is good for her. I begin to think what Mr. Dyke says is true, that Miss Freeward must have a finger in every pie.

However, I was glad of her at the practice, for everybody behaved as well as possible, and there was not an attempt at nonsense. It is our last, and we are to have at the concert a man that Mr. Warne has heard of, who recites and sings in the Corney Grain style. Mr. Pierce was not there—a real comfort. He has practised quite enough. The concert is to be on the 15th.

November 18.—The concert has given me enough to think about. To my surprise, the strange star, as Mr. Dyke calls him, turned out to be no other than F. M.'s old comrade, Joe Edwards ! I remembered instantly how he used in the old days to keep us in fits of laughing by changing his voice and going on like a whole party conversing together ; and now it seems he has given up cabinet-making, and lives by his talent. 'Mrs. Pettitoes' Tea Fight,' as he called it, was very comical, if a little vulgar, and it put every one into such ecstasies of laughing that there was no quieting down the lads again, but they stamped and bawled 'Bray-vo !' and 'Ang-core !' till we were nearly deaf and could hardly hear anything. They did not listen a bit to poor Mr. Pierce's song ; there was a cat-call in the very midst of it, but somehow that annoyance lessened the awkwardness.

I hoped Mr. Edwards would not recognise me, as I was a mere child when he saw me last ; but when I stepped down from the platform after the National Anthem, which no one could hear for the noise of those boys and the shuffling of feet, he held out his hand, and said, 'Miss Jessie, this is an unexpected pleasure.' There were not many moments, for a trap was waiting to take him to meet the mail train at Overbury, but what he said was a great shock.

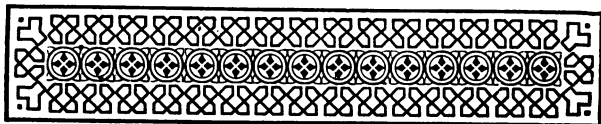
'Ah ! that was a sad business about your poor

sister, such a sweet pretty girl as she was. Did you know that scamp F. M. was in England? I saw him last week.'

Then some one touched him on the arm and told him that the driver said he would be late for his train; and he was off before I had time to ask or say anything, or to beg him not to tell anything that could give that wretch a clue to our whereabouts. However, from the way he mentioned my sister I think he must suppose that she is dead. I trust that both he and F. may think so, and that would be a sufficient protection; for even if he mentioned me, there could hardly be any inducement to seek me out. Of course I have given Amy no hint, and this book, locked with the key on my watch-guard, is quite safe to tell my fears to.

I did tell her of Joe Edwards and his performance, and it set her off talking of merry old times, at first laughing over them, and then crying till she became so much excited that she did not sleep all night; nor did I, between watching her, trying from time to time to soothe her, and thinking over the matter myself.

It is as if all our peace and security were over, just as she was beginning to recover a little. Well, there is nothing for it but prayer. May God protect her from that wicked man.



CHAPTER XI.

A LETTER FROM LADY MARY BROOKE.

Torquay : December 10.

MY DEAR MR. HARDWICKE,—I hope you will not think me very troublesome, but I am a good deal distressed at the accounts I hear from the Freewards and Mrs. Bonny of the schoolmistress ; and I cannot think that you are aware of all that is going on. They quite agree with you that the children are in good order, and seem to be altogether more regular and well-disciplined than they were in dear old Mrs. Pearson's days, since there can be no doubt that she was utterly unequal to the Ruination immigration, and I shall always believe that it caused her death. I suppose such an improvement is the natural consequence of having a thoroughly trained mistress. But outside the school things seem to be very unsatisfactory. The mistress seems to have made no friends in the village, and to have given herself airs, rejecting all

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Betsy Bolton's kind offers of assistance, and setting up little Rose Shepherd, if not Frances, against her. She is evidently not guarded in manners with young men. Then there seems to be a general impression of secret meetings with a disreputable-looking man, whom she calls her cousin, and who seems to be connected with those systematic poachers at Overbury. And she seemed to be on familiar terms with a man who spoilt the last village concert by a vulgar edition of Corney Grain. There is evidently something strange about the sister who lives with her, so that the place is full of rumours and doubts whether this sister is or is not married. The Freewards called upon her, thought her inane and affected, very stiff and unpleasant with them, and she rejected all their offers of needlework. Bonny says the Hewitts are quite distressed at Bertha's being under so unsatisfactory a person, and the Freewards think the girl far from improved; and I cannot approve of the arrangement for Frances Best, nor, indeed, for the sake of the parish and school. I am sure you must have been deceived, and I hope you will inquire.

Yours affectionately,

MARY A. BROOKE.

FROM THE REVEREND CHARLES HARDWICKE.

Brookfield Vicarage : December 12.

MY DEAR MARY,—I do not think you need be alarmed. I knew all about the Martins before they came, poor things, and a very sad story it is. They belonged to a respectable family at Bath ; their father was an upholsterer's foreman, and the elder sister one of the seamstresses. Jessie Martin, our mistress, went through her course as pupil-teacher, and then to Fishponds, after which she worked with great success at my old friend Canon Leslie's school at Pirlee. It was he who recommended her to me. The father had died some time before, and the other sister, Amy, had been foolish enough to marry a cousin, fancying that she should reform him. I believe he had been brought up with her, and she had the devotion for him that you women *will* bestow on unworthy objects. She, poor thing, was incapable of keeping him straight ; he drank and gambled away her share of her father's savings, and, after a course of ill-usage and misery, ended by knocking her down with her baby in her arms at the head of the stairs. He was arrested on the spot, convicted on evidence of fellow-lodgers, and, when his sentence was out, embarked for America with money raised from the sale of goods that had been left in charge

of the landlady. The wife had been taken to the hospital with a broken leg and damaged spine ; and the child, after lingering on just long enough to prevent its father from being tried for manslaughter, and to show that life meant imbecility, died of the effects of his brutality. Jessie Martin had determined to undertake the care and support of her sister ; and, as it was very desirable that the wretched man should lose all traces of her, it was thought better that she should leave Pirlee, as being too near Bath and among those who knew the story and respected her. I am not sure that they were wise in this, but poor Amy Martin, who had been rather a beauty in her way, coming out of the hospital, crippled, bent, and desolate, had a morbid terror of being seen or addressed by any of her old acquaintance, and, indeed, absolutely insisted on removing where she should be a perfect stranger. With so common a name as Martin it seemed quite possible that here no one should have any suspicions, nor even, from what you say, do I think there were any. Perhaps it is unfortunate that she continued to shrink from all notice and society ; and her sister, being necessarily absent from her all day, and very desirous of cheering her and keeping up her spirits, has thus been debarred from going out. I must say, too, that they are of a slightly superior class to the ordinary run of our village society, and good

Betsy Bolton is far too homely to be a companion to Miss Martin with her training-college culture and considerable mental power.

Mrs. Martin is not quite her sister's equal. I have seen a good deal of the poor thing, and find her a gentle, innocent-minded, broken-spirited creature, good and dutiful, and still caring for that wretched man, as is the way of good women, far more than he could ever have deserved ; but, as far as I could understand, the fellow had won her affections by being her tyrant as her playfellow in her childhood, and she had married him contrary to all good advice. It is to her shrinking from observation that all the complaints of Miss Martin's unsociability are due. Unfortunately, the ventriloquist, whose performance really had no harm in it, except making the lads ungovernably boisterous, had been once a workman in the upholstery establishment at Bath, and mentioned the meeting to Frederick Martin, who had returned to England, and he came in pursuit of Miss Martin to Overbury. Jessie absolutely refused to tell him where his wife was, and eluded his pursuit, but gave him what money she could spare, and she kept silence when she came home. It was a great mistake not to have consulted me, as I could have taken some measures with him ; but he was holding out to her that if he had this or that he would take himself off, and she had a natural reluctance to

mentioning the subject, and especially dreaded her sister's hearing of his being in the neighbourhood.

I cannot justify her here, but I suppose it was only natural. However, it is all over now. The man, as was inevitable, must have traced her out, and the day before yesterday, the very day you wrote to me, when she came home from school she found her sister gone, leaving a note saying that 'her Fred' (poor foolish thing) had found her out, and had promised that all should be forgotten and forgiven (!!!), adding that it was her clear duty to be with him; he had found an excellent situation, had taken the pledge, and all would be well. She was sure it was better for her dear Jessie not to have a painful parting, and they would love each other all the same, &c. Jessie would get on much better without her, for she felt that a poor broken-down creature only did harm.

This is true enough, but poor Miss Martin rushed to me in despair, quite sure that the man would end by killing her sister, and wanting to know if they could not be pursued. Of course this was only the first wild feeling, for there was no indication whither they were gone; and even if, there had been, we could not take away his wife unless she had been willing to swear to the injury he had done her.

Miss Martin is a sensible girl, and saw presently that there is nothing for her but to wait and go on

with her work, hoping for the best, and she is trying to do so bravely, but she is sadly crushed. I have just seen her, and she speaks most warmly of Mrs. Bolton's kindness, and no doubt all Betsy's good feeling would be brought out. Thus I hope you are convinced that there is really no scandal, nor occasion for all this gossip. The whole affair is known now, and I should hope that whoever has set about spiteful reports may repent. I have seen the Freewards, and I hope I have convinced them. Miss Martin is an admirable mistress; not only the children but the pupil-teachers are much improved. Bertha Hewitt is an uppish girl who kicks against discipline, but even she is less pert and conceited, and Frances Best is more alive and little Rose more attentive. I can see no reason why we should deprive the parish of an excellent schoolmistress, or persecute a good young woman because of her strong and devoted affection for a sister with a scamp of a husband. If you were here you would see it in that light.—My dear Mary, yours affectionately,

C. HARDWICKE.

LADY MARY BROOKE'S ANSWER.

December 15.

MY DEAR MR. HARDWICKE,—I am very sorry to differ from you, and so is Brookfield. I am sure we should be very sorry to persecute any one, but our

first duty is to the parish ; and if this Miss Martin is such an excellent mistress, she can have no difficulty in getting another situation. Surely she would be much better in London, where no particular heed would be taken of her connections, and she would have the protection of living in lodgings. It can be hardly safe for a young girl to live in that lonely cottage, when a wretch like that might attack her at any time. Caroline Freeward has written to me, and she feels just as I do, that though we may greatly pity the poor young woman, it is not well for the sake of the parish to retain her. The sister and the husband may return and fasten upon her at any time, and think what that would be! Brookfield would not hear of such a possibility.

I suppose the ability and good discipline are to be found in any trained mistress, and there might easily be more friendliness, and such influence as was so valuable in dear Mrs. Pearson. Caroline tells me that many of the parents are complaining of her strictness, and the over-pressure which is such a fatal thing to children.

Brookfield means to run down a day or two after Christmas. I think you and he and Rodney and Caroline Freeward are school managers, so if we decided accordingly due notice might be given at once. I trust we are not unkind, and I do not like to go against your judgment, but it is plain that

there is a want of straightforwardness, and Brookfield says a schoolmistress with such connections cannot be tolerated.—Yours affectionately,

M. A. B.

P.S.—Can't she go to a colony? she would be very valuable there, and make her fortune.

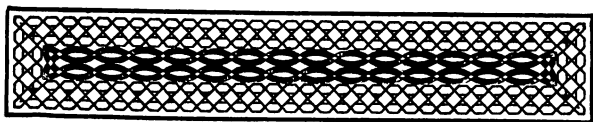
FROM THE REV. C. HARDWICKE.

December 18.

MY DEAR MARY,—I wish you had been at home. If you school managers outvote me, of course I cannot help it, but I am very sorry, and I give you warning that I shall do my best with your brother and Miss Freeward, and there may be some change of purpose.—Yours affectionately,

C. HARDWICKE.





CHAPTER XII.

LOG-BOOK—GONE!

DECEMBER 23.—I have not had the spirit to write; besides that I was in dread of setting anything down for fear of Amy's seeing it; but, alas! all that is over now, and it is a certain relief even to tell my faithful book about it. Mr. Hardwicke wishes I had told him. Perhaps I ought, but I durst not speak, and I do not know whether I did wrong or not.

Mr. Edwards had betrayed us, though perhaps I should not use that word, for he had no reason to think that I wished for concealment. On the second Saturday after that unlucky concert, when I went to Overbury to do some commissions and change the books, the first person I saw when I reached the platform to come home again was Fred Martin. We knew each other directly. He is not much altered: he had smart clothes, as far as I could see under his ulster, but there is a more

rowdy look about him than there used to be. 'Well, little Jess,' he said, 'I thought I would run down and have a look at you, hearing you were in this part. Quite the lady, eh? What's the name of your place, and how do you get there?' It seems that Mr. Edwards had given him the address on a slip of paper, but he had lost it, happily as I then thought, and was trying to find it out, but I doubt whether any one knows me at Overbury except the library people. I did not tell him, and greatly advised him not to come, at which he laughed, and said he supposed he should be a startling visitor for the school marm; but since he had had the pleasure of seeing his sweet little sister-in-law, who, after all, didn't seem much delighted to welcome him, he would not trouble her, only he must have something to help a poor fellow. There was a capital situation open to him as stage carpenter, and part owner of some kind of panorama show, only he must have 10*l.* to put into it, and he thought I might find that for him for old kinship's sake and poor Amy's. I was so angry at his making her a plea that I exclaimed that I could not think how he, of all people, dared bring up her name; to which he answered with his horrid grin that if not, may be the school marm might have a guest who would make her parson and old woman stare. If I had been alone, I would have dared all the scandal; and, indeed, he could not have done me

much harm if all could have been explained ; but for him to come and find Amy and drag her away to be her death was not to be thought of, speaking in a hurry with the train just stopping. So as I had enough in the savings bank of my own to buy him off without her knowledge, I agreed to send him the 10*l.* ; only he could or would not give me any address, as he is moving about and cannot tell where he may be from week to week ; but as of course I needed time to procure the money, he was to send to or call at the Overbury post office for a letter addressed to him there. By that time the train was almost starting, and I jumped into a carriage, but he caught me on the step, and said, 'By-the-bye, when did Amy die ?'

'Much you care,' I said, and was thankful that a whole stream of people came crowding and separated us ; but when I got out at Huckster's Pool Mrs. Bolton did so too, and the first thing she did was to ask to whom I was talking. 'To a cousin,' I said, 'whom I had not seen for a long time.'

It was only the truth, and I thought with comfort of Amy's shutting herself up so as to hear nothing of the gossip of the village. I might have done more wisely, perhaps more rightly, to have gone at once to the vicar ; but I was afraid of every word I said, and I dreaded any one's knowing that man was about, and above all that Mr. Hardwicke might insist on Amy's hearing, and tell

me that I had no right to keep man and wife asunder. Besides, I thought that when Fred had got the money he would be satisfied, and I should hear no more of him for a long time.

No such thing. When I was on my way to the post office about the money, there he stood in the street. He took it from me as if I were paying him his wages, and then began to question me about Amy, so that without a falsehood I could not keep from him that she was alive ; but I took care to let him know that she was quite a cripple, had lost the good looks he cared for, and was in broken health, hoping that such a description would prevent him from having any wish to be troubled with her. He asked where she was, to which I flatly replied that I was not going to tell him on any account. He laughed a little, and said that was little Jessie's own temper ; but I need not be afraid : a crisp ten-pounder was a handier thing to drag about than a puling woman.

So I hoped that I was rid of him, but by way of precaution I went into one of those great store shops where they sell all sorts of things, and which I knew had an entrance into another street. I went out by that door, and walked all the way home, that he might not meet me on the platform again.

I came home of course late, wet and dirty. Amy thought I had missed my train, and I let her

suppose so, while, dear thing, she petted and cosseted me, and changed my boots, and gave me hot tea, always treating me as her little young sister, whom she has to take care of—(a tear blot). It won't do to think of, and I thought all the danger was past for the present, and began to take heart again.

The vicar says if I had told him he would have seen Fred and tried to make terms ; and that, after what had passed, Amy could have been protected by the law against him. But I doubt whether she would ever have consented, for every now and then I saw how much she cared for him, and once I caught her crying and kissing his photograph. I would as soon have kissed a viper's ; but then he never did anything to me but bullying and teasing, and he did make love to her—such love ! To have seen that is enough to prevent a girl from ever putting faith in any man.

Another fortnight went on. Amy said once or twice that I was restless and uneasy, and she could not tell what was the matter with me. Was I keeping anything from her ? I said, 'What should I be keeping from her ?' Then she was sure something had happened to Fred, and she worked herself into a fright and agony lest I should have heard he was dead or ill, and be concealing it. I could truly say that I had heard nothing of the sort ; I could almost have said I wished I had. May I be

forgiven, for though I said nothing untrue, I did let her think I was worried about some foolish, grumbling parent, as indeed was the fact. Then, somehow, through Mrs. Dyke, I believe, Amy found out about Mr. Pierce, and was sure I only rejected him on her account ; and say what I would, she cried and declared that she would not have me give up my prospects for her, and that she was a burthen, only doing me harm and making people look with suspicion upon me. Again and again I declared that I did not care one rush for Mr. Pierce, and that it was my school I was wedded to ; while she, my own dearest, was all I had to love with my whole heart, my home, my happiness, my everything. She seemed to believe it for a time, but several times when I came in on those dark November evenings I found her sitting moping over the fire, fretting, and beginning it all over again, sometimes wondering about her poor dear Fred, and if it was very cold where he was. That I could not bear—not only to have her pining after that fellow, but for her to make me feel myself deceiving her.

I grew cross—perhaps it was from my bad conscience—and spoke sharply to her for being so weak and silly as to moan after a man like that, who had well-nigh been the death of her as well as of her poor baby. Then she rose up quite hot and angry, and said that was not the way to speak to a wife of her husband.

‘Such a husband!’ I said, but she turned away and crept upstairs. We did make it up again when I came up to say my prayers, and we kissed and went to sleep, holding each other’s hands, or I think my heart would be broken, for oh! that was the way we spent our last evening together! If I had only known it!

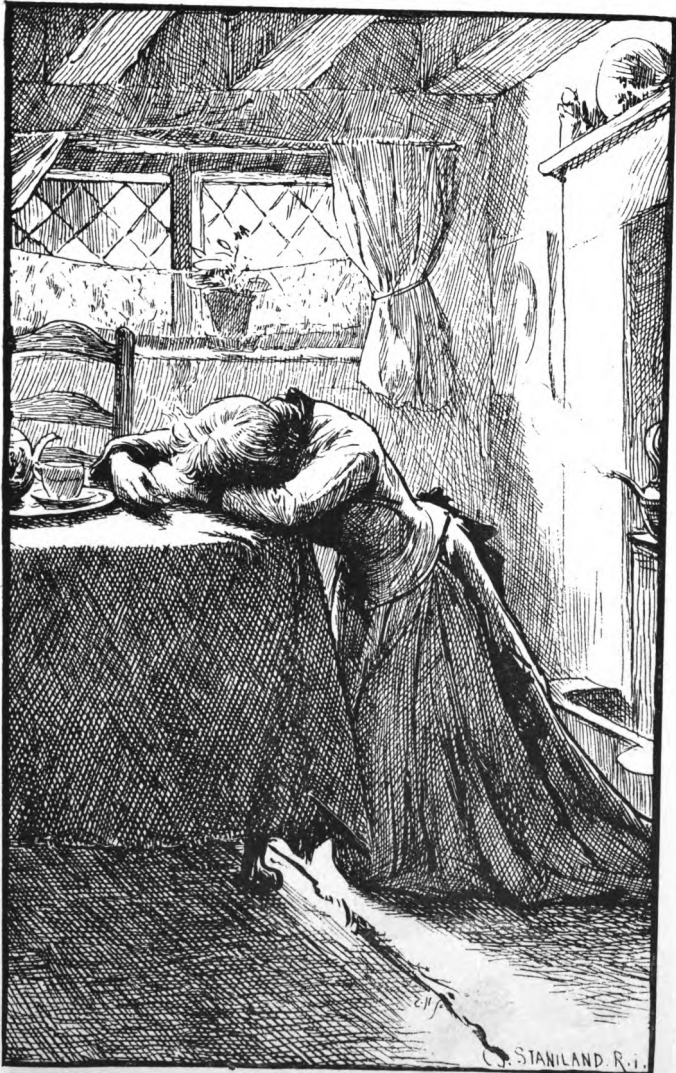
For when I came home the next evening she was gone! Dear thing! the hearth was made up, the kettle by it, the tea-things put out—as if I could eat or drink with her gone; and there was this little note on the table:

‘DEAREST SISTER,—Do not be angry or vexed with your poor Amy. He has come for me, and there is no time to let you know, and we could not bear the parting. He is so dear, he is in an excellent situation, and he has taken the pledge, and he says I can help him, and all is forgiven and forgotten, and it is my duty; so do not grieve, dearest, dearest Jessie. You will get on better without your poor loving

‘AMY.

‘Thank you with all my heart. I will write when——’

That scratch with which it ended showed how he must have hurried her off. She would never have gone without a word to me if that man had



GONE!

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not made her. I was half wild. I started at first to run to the station to see if I could find her there to—I don't know what ; but before I got far I heard Mr. Hardwicke's voice saying, ' Miss Martin, what's the matter ? Is any one hurt ? '

Then I told him, as he had always known Amy's history from the first. He was very kind, but he held me back, and showed me that it was of no use to rush after her to the station, for they must have gone at least an hour before by the only up train that stopped there in the afternoon. Besides, what could I do ? Only irritate Fred, and that would be worse for her. He was in his rights, and we can do nothing, at any rate till we hear from her.

And after all, since she *does* love the man so much in spite of all, may she not be better and happier than even with me ? Oh no, I cannot believe that ! He is not changed ; I could see that. It will be all misery ; and he will kill her by inches if he does not kill her outright. Oh ! my Amy, my sweet tender Amy, that she should be in such hands !

The vicar was very good to me. He wanted me to stay at the vicarage that evening, but I could not bear the notion of being with even his kind old housekeeper ; it was worse than even my empty house.

I got through school as I could, and it did me good on the whole to be forced to attend to some-

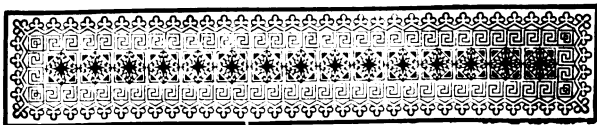
thing. Luckily Miss Freeward had a bad cold, and Mrs. Bolton was goodness itself to me. I cannot think how I ever thought her cross and jealous. The vicar explained all to her, for she wanted to help me in school and send Bertha to the infants; but the lessons did me good, only my eyes swam and I could not see the needlework, so I was very grateful for her help then. Then she came home with me, and took care of me when I grew faint after crying all night and eating nothing all day. She stayed all the evening, only running home to put the little ones to bed and offering Frances to sleep with me, but there was no need for that. When one is worn out, even with trouble, sleep does come, and I have been up to my work ever since, even to teaching the carols that were begun so joyously. It is not so bad among my children; they are dear little girls, and seem to be sorry for me, they have given so little trouble; but this holiday-time is terrible work. We had planned so much to be done together, and there is no letter. No doubt my poor dear is not allowed to write, and I do not know where she is, nor what sort of Christmas she will have.

I can only pray for her.

Mrs. Bolton has found out how he tracked me. He watched me into the shop, and, as I now remember, I met Bertha and Rose coming out of it; and as he saw that they knew me, of course it

was easy to learn from their chatter—or Rose's, for Bertha declared she had nothing to do with it, but that Rose fancied he was some great hero in disguise seeking us. Foolish Rose! but most likely he would have found us out anyhow. I was a poor ostrich hiding her head in a bush.





CHAPTER XIII.

LOG-BOOK—JESSIE'S CHRISTMAS.

DECEMBER 26 (*St. Stephen's Day*).—
No letter, no news of my poor Amy, unless it is this Christmas card ; but that has only a London post-mark. No doubt Fred will not let her write, though Mr. Hardwicke says they are sure to do so if they want money. Mr. Edwards said Fred had become a sort of stage carpenter to a panorama, and that they met now and then at public places ; but Joe is a wanderer himself, or Mr. Hardwicke would write to him. No one can describe the kindness of friends to me ; I see who are real friends now.

The Dykes are gone to spend Christmas with a brother of hers, taking the baby but leaving Bertie with me ; and the dear little man is a great comfort and pleasure, even when he looks up with his great blue eyes and says, 'Mamy gone away,' or 'Bertie want Mamy,' 'Poor Mamy,' for it shows

how much love for her there is in his dear little heart.

I should like to have spent Christmas with no other company, or at least with only Mrs. Bolton, for the day is saddened to her, for it is her first Christmas without her good old mother; and, besides, it was just in that week that her husband was killed four years ago. But ever since she can remember she has always spent Christmas Day at the Miss Freewards', or their mother's before them, and has taken her little ones and Frances of course.

Mr. Hardwicke asked me to dine with Mrs. Wilkins, his housekeeper, and to bring Bertie. She is a nice, quiet body, who never asks more questions than she can help. 'Why, my dear,' I have heard her say, 'if I was to begin listening to tales I should never have done, nor never know the rights and wrongs of nobody.' So I did not mind her, and there was nobody else but Mr. Stubbins, the old clerk, whose wife and family are all dead, or gone from him. I hope I have not been out of temper with the children or the teachers, though Bertha is provoking sometimes, and has been very impertinent once. I don't suppose I can have been very unkind, for only think! (I should have had no heart to trouble about holly and such things; indeed, they seemed out of place in such a sorrowful house); but when I came home

from a little shopping at Overbury on Christmas Eve there were red berries peeping through the windows, and all the room seemed to have burst out into leaf, sprays behind all the picture-frames, and the statuettes on the mantelpiece in perfect bowers! It was poor little Rosie's doing with the help of Annie Knowles. Dear child, since she has found out the harm her chattering tongue did she has been quite devoted to me, and there seems to be nothing she would not do for me. I suppose it will be a lesson to her for life; only would that it had come in some other way!

None of those teachers are confirmed, they are beginning their preparation; so on Christmas morning Frances was left in charge; I wrapped Bertie up and carried him to the school-house to be with her, while Mrs. Bolton and I went to the early Communion. I wish I could hope that I met my poor Amy in spirit there, but most likely she could not manage it, and her husband was not likely to let her go. At any rate though, her heart would hold spiritual communion with the Lord, who knows her griefs. One comfort is that she is far more serious-minded now than when she first married. There was always great gentleness and innocence about her; but she was wilful in her own soft, quiet way (or she would not have married Fred), and she never seemed to think much about religion, except as something mixed up with

hymns and flowers and music and pretty touching stories. But since her troubles she has been very different ; she has learnt where to look for comfort and assistance ; and who knows but that, as Mr. Hardwicke says, she may do her husband good ? There is the more hope since she took away her Bible and Prayer-book, and all the good little books they gave her at the Convalescent Home, though she left mother's work-case, which she was so fond of, and which has some really valuable things in it, such as my prize gold thimble. She could not have told Fred, for he has carried off the three silver tea-spoons, which were all we had left of what mother's master gave her at her wedding. I could not tell the vicar of that, but it takes away my hopes of him—unless, indeed, he did not know they were mine, not hers.

When we got home from church, there were the children to dress, and lots of things to look at. My old college mates have sent me so many cards and letters and little gifts that I am ashamed to have had no spirit to write to them ; and there were full twenty presents and cards from my dear little pupils here. Rose's is a very pretty pen-wiper of her own making, and a lovely card with an old castle on it. It is very nice that these children are beginning to be fond of me ; they must be all my care and thought now, and they are, many of them, really good children, even Louie Lamb, who sends

a very bent-looking card in a dirty envelope with a great blot, and 'From your afex—loving skolla, Louisa Lamb' on it.

We took all our three little ones to church, where they were very good. Jemmie and Bessie knew all the Bethlehem story nicely, and can sing 'Once in David's royal city,' and Bertie tried to sing along with them. The church is beautiful with holly and flowers in pots from the conservatory at the park. The Miss Freewards and Miss Warne with Bertha and Frances were about it all the day before yesterday. I should have been glad to help, but they did not ask me, and they might have thought it forward in me to offer. The service was very beautiful, and the singing raised one's heart; and the sermon, on 'good-will to men,' was as cheering as if the vicar had meant it on purpose for me.

Bertie and I went back from church to the vicarage with the little maid, who made very much of him, and so did Mrs. Wilkins. By-and-by came Mr. Stubbins, and then the vicar looked in and said he wished us all Christmas blessings—he was very kind and delicate not to say a *merry* Christmas—and then he said grace for us, and went off to Miss Freeward's, where he always goes on Christmas Day.

Mr. Stubbins told us all about old times before Mr. Freeward was vicar, when there were no

ladies, as he said, a-meddling and a-muddling about the church with their flowers and trash, and nobody ever thought of breaking into the service, but the clerk's voice sounded out hearty and all alone, and the singers had a gathering all to themselves, and came out with the tunes something like, with a bassoon and a clarionet and a bass viol and two fiddles to help them, and Aaron Long 'to sing the solys, except when he'd had a drop the night before at the "Brookfield Arms," for you never could reckon on him. There was no teetotal societies then,' and he looked contemptuously at my glass of water while he enjoyed his Christmas ale. Mrs. Wilkins says he is as sober a man as ever lived, and she believes he always was, but he does not allow that any of the changes are for the better, and shakes his head and says, 'Aye, aye, 'tis all very fine, but human natur is human natur, and if it don't break out in one place it will in another.'

'And that's true enough, Master Stubbins,' says the housekeeper; 'there's nothing for it but the grace of God.'

Then she put him into her easy chair, with his blue pocket-handkerchief on the top of his head, to go to sleep; and Bertie and I helped her wash the dishes till Bertie was sleepy too, and we sat down, and I said hymns to Mrs. Wilkins in a low voice till it was time to get tea, after which the vicar came

home, and some of the boys came carol-singing. Then Mr. Stubbins set off to light the church for evening service, and we left Bertie with the girl while we went again to a joyous evening service, almost all carols, and so it was a brighter feast-day than I dared to expect.

January 1.—Mr. and Mrs. Dyke are come home, and it was pretty to see Bertie spread out his arms and trot up to them, quite gasping with joy to see dada, mamma, and baby again. Mr. Dyke seems to have changed his mind a good deal on his trip. His brother-in-law has a Board school in a new place of cheap houses, where the clergyman has nothing to do with it, and nobody takes any interest in the children except to keep down the expenses and keep up the grant. It is just what Mr. Dyke was wishing, not to be interfered with ; but he says that he could scarcely put his head out of doors without being horrified and disgusted at the conduct and language of the children, both girls and boys. His brother-in-law, Mr. Groves, said there was no helping it ; they cared for nothing he could do to them, for if he struck them their parents prosecuted for an assault, and, after being fined twice, he should try no more of that. Mr. Dyke said he never had to strike a boy once in a quarter, and Mr. Groves asked what he gave blows for. Well, he said, once he flogged a boy for a theft followed by lying, and several times he had given a stripe

or two to stop bad language in a new-comer or for bullying or cruelty. Mr. Groves laughed, and said at that rate he would never give his arm any rest here. These children were reduced to order in school, except for an outbreak now and then, but in the playground or the street it was of no use to think about them. Then he went on to say how disheartening and depressing it was to have no one to give him a word of sympathy or interest, to care whether the children got on, or to show them good manners, give them harmless pleasures, or lend them interesting books. As to religious instruction, he does what he can, but the pupil-teachers think it a bore, and the children come too late for it half their time, and the worse sort of boys are apt to make jokes and repeat what they have picked out of the wicked Sunday papers their fathers take in; and there are he and his delicate young wife alone in the midst of all this evil.

‘No,’ said Mr. Dyke; ‘my boys may be loutish and backward, idle sometimes and noisy, but they are, take them altogether, mostly simple-hearted, honest little chaps, clean-tongued and willing; and if a rougher lad comes in from Ruination, they lick him into shape better than I can do. They know how to behave themselves, and they do. Why, I heard more foul language while walking ten yards from the house with Groves, than I have heard in all the three years I have spent here. My boys

are not angels, but they are as far from those neglected lads as light from darkness. I have thought there was too much for my taste of the clerical and lady element, as the paper says, but any amount is better than none at all.'

And Mrs. Dyke said she was glad he knew when he was well off, and she believed that, if her brother did not change his situation soon, his poor wife would be quite worn out by those rude girls, though she only taught them sewing.

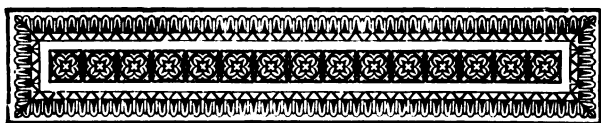
Then came in Mr. Pierce, just returned from his holiday at home. His father is a florist, and he had brought a lovely bouquet of camellias and ferns for me. I could not refuse it, but I did divide it with Mrs. Dyke. I see he thinks there may be more hope for him now, but I must let him perceive by my manner there is not. It is very generous in him, but no one is to be put in Amy's place, and I must have my little house ready for her at any time when my poor dove may flutter home wounded to me! I can't be taken up with a man to hinder me from taking care of her. Besides, I always resolved to work for five years; nor do I believe he is well enough off to marry yet, most certainly not to have Amy on his hands.

Rose Shepherd is coming to sleep with me. Mr. Hardwicke advised it, and her parents are glad she should be saved the winter walk in all weathers. They think her improved, and, poor

child, she is bitterly grieved at the mischief her chatter has done, and is very nice and loving. I mean to get her out of her taste for silly reading, and put something better in her way.

Then there is the inspection coming. Time will be full enough, if that could stop the ache in one's heart. But there are prayer and hope, and there are many really dear children whom I heartily love, and others who are improving.





CHAPTER XIV.

BERTHA'S NARRATIVE—TEA-TABLE TALK.

IT came out, of course, that Mrs. Martin's husband was a horrid wicked man, who had been in jail for nearly killing her.

Really I don't think people talked of much else at all the parties. Miss Lucas said her ladies were very much annoyed at such a connection having been brought into the parish, and that they were going to write to Lady Mary about it. Susan Elcock said she had seen them going by together on the way to the station, and that he was a fine tall figure of a man, and she was but a little bit of a thing hobbling along by his side, and he as careful of her as possible. Then they said no doubt she was a little aggravating thing, and the fault in such cases was always the woman's; no wonder she was ashamed to show her face after having got her husband into prison. Mrs. Bryce was very angry too, and declared that the girls should go to school at Overbury, till she found

how much it would cost to send them in by train every day, and still more to board them there.

But Mrs. Bolton had quite gone over to the other side, and said Miss Martin had acted like the best of sisters, and that if poor Mrs. Amy was married to a wicked man, it wasn't her part to run about telling everybody. And Frances and Rose were just as bad. Rose said he was a fiend in human shape, though she had once taken him for the grand count or baronet, or something, in disguise, come to bring them to their fortune. Arthur Norton found it out, and used to tease her about it till he made her cry. She had got so fond of both of them, and Frances was so sorry that they never would allow that Miss Martin had grown horribly cross and strict; but then they were favourites—at least Rose was, coming to sleep with her at night, and I was sure she spited me. She did worry so if the children miscalled ever so little a word that a baby could read, such as *if* for *it*, or if they wrote *his* instead of *is*; and said it showed great carelessness and inattention on the teacher's part—just as if it were my fault instead of that of the stupid little things, or as if such nonsensical bits of words were of any consequence.

She said a great deal about prepositions making all the difference, when we were at our lessons afterwards, but she had no business to bring it up again then, so I would not attend to her. It did

seem a real shame to go on at me, when I always could do everything ever so much better than either of the other two! She made us do our lessons in her own house, which certainly was made very nice for such a pokey place, but she was horribly tiresome over them, making us look out every stupid place in the map, and teasing about subjects and objects in our analysis, and telling the reasons of everything we did in our sums, and even wanting us to care about the people in our history. Rose did, I believe, though Arthur declared she only pretended to do so, to get favour, and said it was mean; for nobody could care about a tiresome old chap like Sir Philip Sidney, who had been dead three hundred years, and whose glass of water was in the second standard books.

Frances was very near crying about those adverbs and prepositions, when the word is so nasty as to change from one to the other. At first she almost had believed Miss Martin made her out wrong on purpose to tease her; but she had changed now, though she never could get hold of the rights of it; and the reasons of rules in arithmetic were worse to her, but Miss Martin always was tender to her puzzles; and that wasn't fair, for I always did my sums right, and could understand all about them when I laid my mind to it, only it really was too much bother to be set to tell how and why, when I had done it by a sort of knack that I have;

and I was tired of hearing Miss Martin say that unless I could explain I should never be fit to be a mistress.

Then there was a dreadful row on St. Thomas's Day because Arthur looked across the church and smiled at me, when Mr. Pierce watched her all up the aisle, as we all came in with the school-girls, for we were sure it could only be after her that he came on saints' days. And then, again, Arthur looked at me when old Miss Creeper came in, for she had got on the old fur tippet that he always said was made of the skin of a mangy old stable cat fifty years ago. When I caught his eye, I could not help laughing, and then the organ ciphered in the middle of a hymn, and he made such a face that it set me off so that I had to hold my pocket handkerchief up to my face.

Arthur had it in the vestry, Mr. Dyke at him first and then the vicar; and they said such things that he was ready to ask his father to let him give up his apprenticeship, for he had been engaged to teach the boys, not to be jawed for doing no harm in church, but only smiling to himself, and only on a week day, too!

As to me, I got it all round. First there was Miss Martin; but I had an answer for her, and said, 'People had better not give occasion!' and I looked her in the face so that she got quite red and she must have known what I meant; and I

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could hear a quiver in her voice, though she made it quite grave as she said, 'There can be no occasion that can excuse such disrespect to the place you were in.'

And then came the vicar, very sharp indeed about unmaidenly giggling and irreverence, telling me that a girl who behaved like that was not fit to be set in authority over others. I could not answer him, of course; but the Miss Freewards both set upon me next, Miss Margaret wanting, in her soft, gentle, cooing way, to know what *could* make me capable of such levity, as she called it. 'Well, ma'am, it was Mr. Pierce and Miss Martin.'

It was a shame of me, and I wished afterwards I had said something about their having done nothing, but I couldn't get it in, and it was fun to see how she gave a deep long sigh, and went on about however my elders might unfortunately become the cause of foolish remarks, young people ought not to think about such things, and it was irreverent at church, and forgetting where one was, and carrying on with boys. I did not say a word about the old fur tippet, for she would have had no mercy on our making a mock of that, though she would not have minded the organ so much. I know it was very wrong altogether, and I have been sorry since, but I was quite glad then to have scored something against Miss Martin, who had worried me so much all these last weeks.

The ladies did not ask her to help to decorate the church, and we were sure they meant something by it. I never saw the ladies so watchful about our whispering a word to one another all the time, though Arthur was not there, being gone home for his holidays. His father is in the hardware business, and I was asked to go there for a change to stay with his sister Harriet.

Father said he could not let me go before Christmas Day ; indeed, I don't think he much liked my going at all ; but mother said I was looking pale, and that that governess did work me ever so much too hard, so that I ought to have a little pleasure. So they let me go for the rest of the week after Christmas Day, and we had a pleasant time of it. One night we went to a concert, and there were parties every day, and such fun that Hartie and I made a plan that I should come and lodge there and learn millinery ; and we thought father and mother would consent, since every one was saying how bad it was for us pupil-teachers to be under such a mistress as Miss Martin. But I don't want to go on about that visit, it has all grown so sad to me now ; but Hartie was a good girl, she always said her prayers, and went to church, and to her G.F.S. Bible class, and was quite steady, though some folks called her noisy, and she was much more in the fashion than they ever let us be at home.

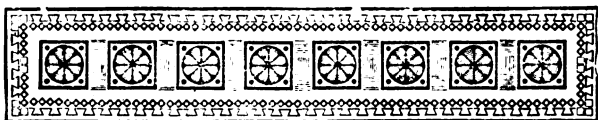
It did seem very dull to come back to the old round of reading out dictation. 'Dogs are—very faithful—comma, and love—their masters—full stop after masters. Capital letter, Once a'— and so on, and marking the same blunders over and over again; but father would not hear of my giving up, he said he had no notion of people being changeable; he had signed papers for me, and I was to go on with it: while as to Miss Martin's not being a nice person to be with, the vicar and the ladies would see to that. Mother said it was not to the mistress, but to the managers that I was bound, and if all she heard was true, there might be a change before long. Miss Lucas told her that Miss Freeward had written to Lady Mary, and his lordship was coming down on the 4th, and then no doubt something would be done.

Nothing had been heard of Mrs. Martin, as they called her now, all this time, except that Harriet Norton had told me that her friend, whose young man was the driver that took the funny gentleman who did 'Mrs. Pettitoes' tea-fight,' told her that he told him that he told her—oh dear! I mean the Pettitoes man said to the driver that Miss Martin's sister had been quite the belle of their circle at Bath, but that she had married a regular drunken rascal, who was the murderer of her child and had been sentenced to penal servitude. So he must have come out with a ticket-of-leave, and now he

was going about with a set of strolling showmen, like Punch and Judy.

Arthur declared that his sister only said 'not much better than Punch and Judy,' and that the words were 'as good as killed the child;' but that was after Mr. Dyke, who always was on Miss Martin's side, had been at him for spreading what he called slanderous reports about an innocent woman. Arthur said it wasn't himself but I that had done so, and I am sure I had told nobody but mother; and if she told Miss Lucas and Susan Elcock, I couldn't help it. Anyway, it was all over the place that Mrs. Martin had gone off with a Punch and Judy show, and some of the rough lads at Ruination were vulgar enough to squeak like Punch when Miss Martin was going by; but I don't believe she knew why it was, for Governess Betsy made Frances and Rose promise never to tell her. And when Mr. Pierce heard it he went at the lads with his horse-whip, so that they all ran away; and though big Jem Jones holloaed out that he would have him up for an assault, he did not venture, having run away before he got more than one stripe.





CHAPTER XV.

BERTHA'S NARRATIVE—HIS LORDSHIP.

THEY all were at me, and said it was our doing, so I want to tell you exactly how it was. I own that I was put out, for when the class list of the diocesan religious examination of pupil-teachers came out, and I was well up in the first class, while Frances was only in the second, and Rose and Arthur in the third, it did not seem a bit to please people, but only to set them to scold me. There was the vicar telling Frances that she had been a good girl and he saw she had taken great pains, and Rose that she was improving ; while to me he only chose to say that I had good abilities, but that he hoped I should lay to heart those words, 'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them ;' and that I must remember that there were higher things than prizes and the praise of men. I am sure I did not get much of that, for Miss Martin said something about wishing I would carry out

what I knew so well. And then came Miss Free-ward : she was glad I had got the prize, but she would have been more glad if she could have seen more reverence and less levity about me ; and then she mumbled something about excuse and change, which was the only comfort I had till I got home, when mother *did* think it a great shame and very unkind of them all, and thought Miss Martin had spited me from the first, from being jealous of me most likely. [Perhaps it was my way of telling it that made mother think so. One does not know what one says when one is vexed, and it was quite true that the idleness and all the rest of it were much worse than if I had been a poor, ignorant, neglected girl, who knew no better. It was for my good, and please God, if I get well, I'll show them that I know it.]

Well, then his lordship came down. I must tell you that he is quite young, full ten years younger than Lady Mary, a handsome, fresh-looking, free-spoken young gentleman, who cares ever so much about the preserves, and is such a shot that father says it is a real pleasure to go out with him. He was to have a party of gentlemen for a week, but he came down for a day or two first by himself, to attend to business. Father was wondering how soon he ought to go up to the house after the dinner would be over, when there was a knock at the door, and there was his lord-

ship, as friendly and hearty and homely as could be. Mother was rather put about that she had not known in time to light the parlour fire ; but he only laughed, and said it was ten times more comfortable where we were in the kitchen ; and he said he would not disturb us, and took a chair and sat down opposite to father by the fire, while mother and I moved a little way off, and she went on with her needlework, and I with my task, as well as I could for the talk that was going on, though it was all about the coverts, and the game, and planning out each day's shooting. I believe they went on more than an hour and a half about it, and mother and I both began to get so sleepy ; we thought they never would have done ; but at last his lordship stood up and began wishing good night.

'I'm keeping you up, Mrs. Hewitt,' he says, 'and little Bertha is winking—nay, big Bertha, I should say. She is grown up a fine jolly-looking girl—does Brookfield credit——eh, by-the-bye, I want to know about that. Mary sent me down with orders to see about a row with the school-mistress. She isn't gone off with Punch, is she?'

We all burst out laughing, as my lord himself did ; and father, who had taught him to shoot, and used to talk to him like one of our own lads, said, 'No, no, my lord, Lady Mary never told you that !'

'No, I can't say she did,' he answered, 'but she is in a great state of mind about the young woman

having a sister with bad connections—run off with a fellow belonging to Punch. Ain't that it ?'

'You've not got it yet, my lord,' said father. 'The poor thing was fetched away by her own husband, so she had no choice but to go. And I don't believe naught as to Punch ; that's only the women's talk. For my part, I've seen nothing against the mistress or her sister either. Very decent bodies, I should say, but the womanfolk are all set against them because they kept themselves to themselves.'

Then mother spoke up, for she was always vexed that father took the mistress's part. She said she didn't wish to hurt no one ; and as to Punch, that was all the boys' nonsense ; but she *did* think Miss Martin was not a proper person to have the care of a place like this, with young girls under her, for she had her favourites, and a young woman like that always had her head full of courting and folly. Besides, the sister had gone off with her husband, it was true, but without a word of notice, and nobody denied that he was given to drink, and had been in prison.

Yes, his lordship answered, that was just what his sister said ; and that if they kept this mistress on, these people would be coming back here, and there was reason to think the man was connected with poachers.

Father laughed at that, and said the fellow was one of those town-bred chaps who could not fire off

a gun, and that he had never heard of Punch and Judy poaching! Still there was no denying that town-bred fellows *did* have connections who encouraged poaching; and that was what Lord Brookfield hated most, and so did father, though he did not greatly believe in this Martin man's knowing about it; but if he tried to speak a word in defence of Miss Martin, mother rose upon him for taking part against his own child.

‘What, doesn’t she hit it off with the mistress?’ asked my lord.

On which mother up and told him how Miss Martin was always down upon me, and I never could do anything to satisfy her, while Rose Shepherd was the favourite, and how they gave me much too hard work to do, showing the book I had been doing my sums from, where there were the questions in circulating decimals, and one about how soon a lot of taps would fill a cistern, all beginning at different times and with a different diameter. My lord held up his hands and groaned at the sight [though, in fact, those difficulties were none of Miss Martin’s causing, but just the requirements for pupil-teachers], and he attended when mother went on to say she should not have let me go on there, but that she understood there was to be a change.

All the family thought ever so much of mother’s opinion, for, as I have heard Mrs. Bonny, the house-

keeper, say, old Lady Brookfield always said she was a sensible woman, who had brought up her children well, and no doubt that weighed with the young lord.

It was meant to be a great secret from all of us young ones, but of course it could not be, for Miss Lucas always heard everything from her ladies when she was brushing their hair at night; and what they did not tell her it was easy to make out from their conversation with each other. So she knew that all the managers had a meeting at the vicarage—Lord Brookfield, the vicar, Mr. Rodney, the agent, and Miss Freeward, who told Miss Margaret all about it in her hearing.

She said she was really sorry to go against the vicar, but that he had been quite talked over, for those women were very plausible, and Miss Martin was clever, taught well, and maintained good discipline, but that was not everything; though Mr. Hardwicke declared that there was the high principle and attention to conduct that was desirable, the ladies did not believe so, and thought him deceived.

Then as to its being cruel to turn her away under a year, when it might be hard to get another situation, Miss Freeward held that she never ought to have come, for it was under false pretences; for though the vicar said he had known of the sister and her troubles, he had been led to suppose the

husband was in America, and that there was not the least chance of his turning up again.

Well, the long and short of it was that all the others were against the vicar. His lordship believed what Lady Mary and my mother had told him, and did not want to have such a fellow as Mr. Martin loafing about the place ; and Mr. Rodney was sure to go the same way as his lordship, so that they were three against one, and so the votes went against the vicar. For in these days the clergyman does not manage it all his own way, as used to be the way in the place where father was bred up ; but he is only one out of a set of managers. Besides, almost all the money for the school comes from his lordship and Lady Mary, so they have a right to a voice.

Father was vexed about it, and said one of these days he should give his lordship a bit of his mind, and tell him that instead of holding his own against the parson, as he was young enough to be proud of fancying he did, he had let himself be carried along by a lot of womanfolk and their gossiping tongues into doing a hard unjust action, such as his father, the old earl, never would have done.

That vexed mother dreadfully, and she cried as I never saw her do before ; but father would not promise not to do it, and I really don't know whether he ever did or not, for all the next week and more there were the gentlemen staying there, for the

shooting and the hunting—pop, pop, pop, in the woods ; and the first day mother was always thinking about poor Joe Bolton, as she never had done before, just because she had had that tiff with father ; and she got terribly nervous when he was late in coming home, though it turned out that he was only helping to pack the cart with the pheasants for the station, and he came in with a couple of rabbits over his shoulder, as pleased as possible, and all of a smile at the bags they had made, and because my lord had shot better than any of them. He had quite forgotten that there had ever been words with mother, but she hadn't ; and though she said nothing, she made me take one of the rabbits early the next morning to ask Miss Martin to accept it from her and father. I did not much like doing it, so I took it round to the back kitchen, thinking to leave it there, but I found Rose washing vegetables, and crying over the crock, and she flew at me like a little spitfire, saying she wondered how I dared to come with my presents like a crocodile, when I had always been set against our dear sweet governess, and had got her sent away with my wicked tales, evil speaking, lying, and slandering. I said Miss Rose had better look at home, for who had brought all this about by talking to foreigners in the street, such as she had no call to ?

Then Miss Martin heard us, and came in to scold us both for quarrelling. She said she

wished she could go away at once if there were to be disputes like that over her; and that she thanked Mr. and Mrs. Hewitt for their kindness. Every one seemed trying to be kind to her. And then the tears came into her eyes.

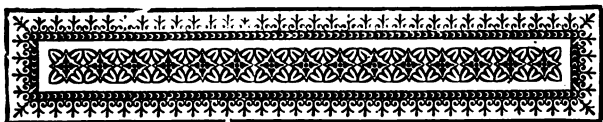
For whatever people had said about her, when it was known that she was going they seemed to turn all round, except perhaps Susan Elcock, who said she was glad to have unmasked a viper; and Miss Lucas, who was proud of her ladies having listened to her and got their way. The children all cried. I think Rose set them off, and their handkerchiefs were all wet through, and their slates in such a mess! And the parents who had grumbled the most said now they didn't like changes, that the children had never been so good, nor got on so well, and that the gentlefolks didn't know when they had got a good mistress.

While as to Governess Betsy, who had been so set against Miss Martin from the first, Frances told me it was enough to frighten one to hear her standing up to Miss Freeward, as father might have done to his lordship. 'You've done a right down cruel thing, Miss Caroline,' says she, 'turning adrift a poor innocent orphan, and putting a slur on her character, when she has no one to speak for her, and hasn't a fault but being a good sister.'

Francie heard no more, for they saw her and sent her out. And yet after all much was owing

to Mrs. Bolton's own murmurings when first the ladies came home! She would have been glad enough to take it all back. I seemed the only one who had been the same all along, never liking the mistress, nor giving in to her a bit more than I could help.





CHAPTER XVI.

JESSIE'S LOG-BOOK—CASHIERED.

JANUARY 8.—I did not expect this! I am not to stay here. Lord Brookfield came to the Park some days ago, and there was a meeting of the school managers; and the vicar came in the evening to tell me it had been decided that I had better not remain here under the circumstances. My notice is for three months, till the Easter holiday. And he was ready to recommend me very highly.

He said he did not find fault, nor did any one else, with my management of the school, or my teaching of the children; indeed, I do feel quite sure that this is against his wish, though I do think he might have stood up for me a little more. He never said *he* thought, only that the managers thought. Of course I was hurt and angry, and begged to know what he meant; and he said at last that the managers considered the connection with Fred Martin undesirable for the parish. He

went on to say hastily that he did not think it would be the same objection everywhere—in a London school, for instance, where people's affairs are not so liable to be discussed by their neighbours—and he returned again to say what recommendations he would give me. Then, saying something about not letting the children know, he got away, leaving me certain that this is against his will. Of course it is those spiteful Miss Freewards. No, I ought not to have written that, but I do think it is very hard. To have been only in a school six months makes it so hard to find another !

And as to finding another, how would it be if Amy, deserted and broken-hearted, came wandering here without notice, only to find a stranger ? There are those who would be kind to her, but except the vicar and Mrs. Dyke she hardly knows them even by sight, and what would become of her ?

Oh ! it is cruel ! cruel ! Whoever did it ! That is the worst of it, the very worst ; but any way it is sad enough to leave these children just as they seem to be the one thing that makes my heart ache less. Rose and Annie Knowles, and Kate, who really fights with her temper, and poor Louie Lamb, and all the rest, that I hoped to see grow into really nice girls, and friends as well as scholars.

10 P.M.—I had to leave off to try to comfort Rose, who had been to her home, and came rushing

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in to know if *it* was true. The poor child was like a wild thing, and flung her arms round my neck so as almost to strangle me, saying what I am glad no one else heard about those who have decided this. She never thought his lordship would turn out a wicked earl; she declared she would never curtsy to him nor Miss Freeward again, till I had to scold her and reason with her to bring her to her senses; and she ended by settling that I am to apply for her as pupil-teacher wherever I go, and that Mrs. Amy, as she calls her, is to come back to us there. Talking to her has made me better. I see that I must trust in faith that God will watch over Amy, though I must not wait for her here. I suppose it is a providence. Or is it my punishment for not speaking of my first sight of that man either to her or Mr. Hardwicke? which both tell me was wrong. There is no making out; there is nothing to do but to try to cast the care on Him who can turn it all to the best. So I will try to get a better spirit of forgiveness before I dare to say my prayers for her or for myself. May be the ladies might be offended at what they took to be want of openness, and I believe they had heard quantities of false stories. Little Alice May popped up her face to mine one day, and said, 'Please, ma'am, Martha Rice should say your sister is gone with Punch.' I stopped the tale-telling, but if such

stories are about, no wonder the ladies did not like it. The vicar knew better—yes, he did ; but perhaps he could not help himself. And Lord Brookfield is almost a boy, who no doubt did as his sister had instructed him. But ah ! they did not know what they were doing. No ! I'll not begin all that again !

9th.—Every one is so kind that it quite overcomes me. Mr. Dyke is so hot over it that he wants to write to the 'Overbury Zealot' and the 'School Guardian' about it ; but of course that must not be. His wife promises to look out for Amy, and to receive and direct on any letters to me, so that I may not miss the chance of hearing of my poor wanderer. Mrs. Bolton cries, and storms at every one, so that I could almost laugh ; and she ran in with a cup of hot cocoa, Frances carrying a buttered cake behind, and the two children trotting after, each with a sticky bull's-eye, all by way of cheering me. Even the Hewitts, who were always against me, sent a rabbit this morning ; and as to the children, they shed floods of tears, poor things ; and though I know it is a sort of infection among school-girls, and they were as happy as possible in a quarter of an hour, it was impossible not to be touched.

Perhaps Miss Freeward meant kindness, for she brought me a number of papers about Australia, assuring me of all the advantages of emigrat-

ing, promising me the highest recommendations, an assisted passage, and three or four times my present salary. Of course there can be no leaving England while Amy is there, and so I told her; when she gave me to understand that I am a very foolish young woman not to leave my sister to what she has chosen for herself.

10th.—Here is another act of kindness that has put me in some perplexity. But no! no! no! And yet it is very good of him! Mr. Pierce was away on his rounds when it all happened—I mean the dismissal—but no sooner did he come back to his lodgings and hear of it than he came straight off here to renew all he had said before, and assure me that, whatever other people fancied, he believed nothing against me, and was as devoted as ever, and would care for me and uphold me through thick and thin if only I will let him. It is very noble and generous in him, and he is so good; Mr. Dyke has at different times told me instances. I do like him as I could never like any other man; but it will not do. I must be free for Amy, and not tie a burden about his neck of nobody knows what distress or disgrace. Not that he asked for anything at once except my promise, and my leave for him to care for me. He has an old mother and an invalid brother, and has to help them, so that he can neither marry nor save at present; and of necessity there would be years of waiting.

In fact, he only found out that his brother is never likely to be well again when he went home at Christmas, or he says he should not have spoken to me in the autumn ; but coming home to-day to find me not only deserted, but dismissed and disapproved, and left to fight my way quite alone, he could not help, as he said, coming to beg for the right to comfort me, and to let me know that there is one faithful heart that beats for me as warmly—nay, more warmly—than ever. That was what he said ! It is silly of me to write it, but I do like to see it, though it must not be.

If he had no one belonging to him, and could marry at once and live on here, so as for me to be ready in case Amy should drift back here again, I should be very much tempted—but no, it must not be ! If it were only Amy, there would not be the difficulty ; he would be the best of brothers to her, and she can do a good deal towards supporting herself ; but, in his situation, to be connected with such a man as Fred would be fatal. See only what the very suspicion has brought upon me ; and if I were engaged to him, his goodness is such that he might plunge into all sorts of difficulties if Fred had brought himself and Amy into fresh trouble. It would be the ruin of him, and it would be absolutely wicked in me to bring such things upon him.

No ! I have told him it cannot be, and I must

stick to it. It will be easier for both when I am gone from here ; and yet what a comfort it would be to have such a friend to write to and consult when matters grow difficult for a woman ! and how ungrateful it seems to have to make as if one did not feel such goodness as one really does ! but that is for his sake too. Oh, how silly I am ! God grant me grace and strength to go through with it all as I ought to do.

11th.—He said nobody could hinder him from still caring for me. I must resolve not to encourage that during these three months. There is no knowing whether I wish or don't wish them to be over. At any rate, his goodness has somehow made it easier to pray the prayer for enemies, persecutors, and slanderers ; though when I look up and see Miss Freeward's nice kind countenance, and the young earl's boyish face, I don't feel as if they deserved any such grand names, for they are only under a mistake ; but at any rate I can pray, ' Turn their hearts.'

12th.—Mr. Dyke has brought me the ' School Guardian ' to look over the advertisements. He says I should lose no time in advertising, or answering some of these. That may be true, but none of these look very promising ; I will not go to any place like that where Mrs. Dyke's brother is, and none of the nice places are likely to choose me when they hear of the reasons for parting with

me here. I would rather go back to Bath to Mr. Soles' workroom, but my education would be wasted, and the payment would not be sufficient if Amy came to me broken and helpless. That can only be a last resource.

13th.—It is not so easy to give full interest to the children's studies as when we were likely to go on together for years. It seems flat to be only preparing them for somebody else who may change all the system. I strive not to be either remiss or sharp-tempered with them, and I hope I am not, but it was trying when Miss Freeward reminded me this morning that my future might greatly depend on the inspector's report of the efficiency of my school; as if I needed to have such an object set before me to make me do my duty. I believe she was annoyed at the third class persisting in that bad and disagreeable habit of licking the finger when turning over a page, and I could not well say how often I have reproved Bertha for suffering it, and how entirely Frances has cured her class of doing so. Bertha's were better for a time, but she has let them fall back into the same way again of late. It is very hard to know what to do with a girl of that age, who seems possessed with a spirit of opposition. Perhaps she may be benefited by the change. If only she would be obedient, and what my father used to call conformable, she would be such an admirable girl. There is a great deal

of good in her ; she is perfectly truthful, and can be very kind ; she is uncommonly clever, and has considerable power of teaching and of discipline when she chooses to exert it ; and with a person who can influence her she may be in every way excellent, but it seems as if I only excited her to encounter me with flippancy and as much pertness and disobedience as she dares. She has made the discovery, too, that she is handsome, and torments her hair, and tries affected airs and graces, so that I tremble for her.

16th.—Our diocesan inspection is over. Mr. Ritson, the clergyman who came, knew very well how to draw out the children's knowledge, and he seemed much pleased with them on the whole. There is so much assistance given here in the religious teaching that the head teachers of the school can give some attention to the younger classes, and the numbers are not too large. Then 'Governess Betsy' teaches in that department much better than in any other, and the tinies said and sung their hymns, and knew their little prayers, and answered about Bible stories as prettily as could be wished.

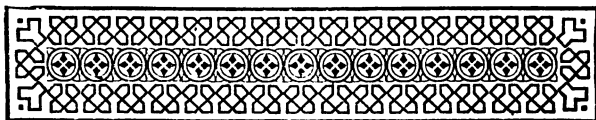
The elder ones all did fairly well too. Annie Knowles made several excellent answers, and Katie Thomson was praised for showing thoughtfulness. The girls were of course very unequal, answering best to Mr. Hardwicke or to me, as they would be

sure to do, but no one in the first class did badly in any of the four subjects, and Mr. Ritson was pleased with their reverent manner. The second class, Frances's, did very well likewise, hardly missing to answer a question on the plain narrative of the wandering in the wilderness; and most of them had some knowledge of the lessons to be derived, and of the typical meaning. That I have taught them, while Mr. Hardwicke had the first class, but the other lessons done with Frances, after preparation with me, showed that pains had been taken, though poor Francie was so shy at having to give a lesson before everybody that she blushed and blundered over the parable of the sower, till Mr. Ritson, in pity to her, let her leave off and asked the rest himself; but by that time the children were confused, and did not do themselves justice.

With the third group, Bertha was not shy, and asked plenty of fluent questions about Joseph, showing what she can do. But when the children were to say the Catechism the old mistakes showed themselves, such as 'Spontius Pilate,' and 'my spirituous pastors and masters.' I have tried to cure this, but it is only about once a fortnight that I can take that division; and telling Bertha to attend to it is useless. There were other failures, too, which made Mr. Ritson observe that it was strange to find that one who could give so good a lesson had not brought out more clear and correct knowledge even in these young ones.

- I hear something of the same kind was noted about Arthur Norton's class. Those two, it may be feared, are doing each other no good. However, there are very few lads who can be trusted to give a religious lesson reverently and earnestly. Yet what is a schoolmaster to do, with all the boys from twelve to seven years old to instruct in these most important subjects in three-quarters of an hour?





CHAPTER XVII.

BERTHA'S NARRATIVE—TAKING HER SWING.

IT is very horrid to have people going and not gone. At least, it was very uncomfortable after Miss Martin had had her notice. There were Frances and Rose always declaring she was so sweet and so dear, just when I felt her crosser and more tiresome than ever, always worrying about little fidgets in the ways of the class, just as if I did not know how to teach them.

There never was such a fuss as when she found Minnie Lee and Susie Dean playing at christening babies; and then she was not half so angry with the children themselves for doing it, as she was with me for standing by laughing to see how they had made a baby out of a pocket-handkerchief and the handle of an old brush. She said they knew no better, and talked to them quite softly instead of punishing them; but she was quite sharp with me, and would like of all things to have

punished me if she had dared. I believe she must have spoken to the vicar, for he gave me a great talking to about my Confirmation, and came very near to threatening to put it off. I wonder what mother would have said to him if he had, when he made no difficulty about that dull Francie and silly little Rosie. (Ah, yes, it is put off now !)

I know I was in a bad way ; I knew it all the time, but I had got to dislike Miss Martin more every day, and to believe all the talk against her, so that something made me pull more and more against her, and the more the other two teachers and the big girls fussed about her the more put out I was. I used to lead them all, and they would go after me if I did but hold up my finger, and now nothing was good enough for them but that carrotty thing, whose sister had gone off secretly with a convict showman.

I always intended to make a change, and be the good girl of the place again, but I could not begin while she was there and give in to her, so I meant to take my swing before turning over a new leaf, and show that I was not going to attend to all her ridiculous little fads ; and Arthur said I was a lass of spirit, and that if we gave in to all the head teachers' fancies there would be no fun and no comfort left in life.

Then came the diocesan inspector. He was a fresh one, and a great deal more particular than

the one before him. I gave a lesson on Joseph before him, and the class answered as if it was all in print, for I knew just what they could answer, and I saw him jotting down his good marks. And then, just to spoil it all, what must he do but go and stick at all the words in the Catechism that they *will* say wrong ! no power will stop them. I do believe he did it on purpose, and put questions to them about their New Testament subjects that they could not possibly answer, laying the blame of it all on me, as if I could help stupid little children's memories being short. He really was very unkind, for when the report came he praised everything except the New Testament and Catechism in my class. They were only marked 'Fair ;' and in the report he said, 'The third group shows less careful instruction than the rest.'

Of course they all set upon me. It is very hard when having good abilities, as they call it, only makes people scold one the more. And last year I had such a good little notice all to myself in the report.

However, Mr. Ritson said so much about the whole school being improved that every one was pleased ; and his lordship, who was still at Brookfield, said he must give us a treat, as we had had no real good one at Christmas since Lady Mary went away. There was a pantomime going to perform at Overbury, and he said he would treat

us all to it. It was 'Little Red Ridinghood,' and there were to be afternoon performances for children, to one of which we were to go.

There was a great deal of settling. I remember Miss Lucas said her ladies did not approve of giving young people a taste for theatrical performances, and that they did not think her ladyship or Lady Mary would have sanctioned it, so that we were dreadfully afraid that Lady Mary might write and put a stop to it all ; but the vicar was good-natured, and said it would do us no harm.

The times of the trains were not convenient, so it was fixed for the children to go in the big break at the Park and one of the waggons. The little ones under eight years old were not to go ; the Miss Freewards said they should have tea and magic lantern instead ; and Governess Betsy, who had old-fashioned notions about playgoing, and said such fine doings did not suit a poor lone widow woman, stayed to help them. So there were only thirty-three to go, and there was plenty of room for them to ride in the waggons.

We were all very much delighted at the notion, but Arthur Norton, who had often been at the theatre at Overbury, said that they had taken a horrid place for us in the upper gallery, where we could not see or hear and nobody could see us. It is a theatre that was built a good many years ago, they say, and there are not always plays in it,

only sometimes when actors come round ; and there are concerts and meetings there.

I went into Overbury on Saturday, and Arthur said we could get tickets at a low figure for going in the lower gallery, and he and I agreed that it would be much jollier than going with a lot of charity children, so that we could not have any fun, nor eat oranges nor anything. So we determined to go in together in the train early in the day, and get our dinner at Mrs. Norton's and go with Harriet.

After all, though, they did not give the boys a holiday that first day. Arthur could not get leave from Mr. Dyke, and very well it was for him that he could not go, though I could not repeat what he said about it. One little knows what is a real mercy.

Father was rather put out about it. He said he saw no sense in my not going with the rest to help look after the children ; but mother said it would spoil all my pleasure to be bothered with them, and she didn't want me to be catching cold, going jumbling along crowded up with all the lot, Ruination ones and all. Besides, I could not have worn my best hat, with the green and yellow paraquet in it, that I bought in the holidays, and which would have sent Miss Freeward into fits if I had offered to wear it at school or church ; and nobody would have noticed me any more than

ordinary-looking Louie Lamb, though his lordship himself said I was such a fine-looking girl.

At any rate, I did enjoy it, when Miss Martin began telling me how I was to come down in the break, and whom I was to pick up by the way, that I could answer, 'I'm not going with you, Miss Martin ; I am going to the lower gallery with Miss Norton.'

'Does your mother understand that?' she asked, a little vexed.

'Oh yes,' I answered ; and then she had no more to say.

Somehow it seems as if everything that day was marked in hard into my mind, so that I can't forget it, though perhaps I shall when I have told it all out. How I put on my pretty crimson merino that I had new for Christmas, and my ulster over it for the train, and my hat with the paraquet, and mother made me take her red cloud in case it should be chilly coming home ; and how I walked to the station, and a young woman in the train noticed my hat, and told me birds had gone out of fashion ; for the great ladies, the Princesses and all, had agreed not to wear them because killing them was so cruel, and all the handsome kinds were almost destroyed.

I remember, too, how many people there were about, gentlemen chiefly, and how I thought they must be all going to the play, but there was some

public meeting going on that day. And we were very merry at dinner at Mr. Norton's; it was a bullock's heart with stuffing, and poor Mr. Norton was so droll about its being hearty, for it was dressed by a receipt Hartie had got, and had taken great pains with.

Yes, Hartie was as good a girl as ever lived. She could have taken quite a genteel situation, but she stayed at home because her mother was not strong, and she did not like to leave her to a rough girl; and she washed, and scrubbed, and cooked, and dressed the shop, and never minded what she did. And she was so fond of her church and her Bible class! She was always asking me questions, for she said I had been so much better taught than she had—which was true, for she thought Job lived after all the kings of Judah, and that St. Chrysostom was an apostle. She had never thought much till her Confirmation, but now she changed very much indeed. When we went up to her room to get ready, she wanted me to help her in her preparation for her G.F.S. Bible class. Their lady had set the class to find out the texts about Paradise and Heaven, and try to distinguish between them, and she was very eager about it, and wished to know which I thought belonged to one and which to the other; but I didn't want to be doing Scripture lessons then, just as if it was half-

M

past nine at school, and I was dreadfully afraid we should be late and not get good places, though she said there was plenty of time, and I gave her no peace till she began to dress. How kind she was ! lending me this locket of her own to wear (they told me to keep it, and I shall never part with it, no, never), and curling my hair over my forehead for me, though first she asked if mother would approve, and I told her oh yes, mother didn't mind ; it was only the ladies who did not think it good for the school children. And so we set off together, as happy as possible, though Hartie would never have gone but for me.

I had never been there before, and we went up the narrow passage, and the stone stairs with a turn in them branching out to our seats, and another turn to the upper gallery. We were quite early, and I watched to see the house filling, but I do believe whenever I was not asking her who people were, and passing remarks on them, she was going on with her texts, for once she said, ‘ “ In Thy presence is the fulness of joy ; ” which would that stand for, Bertha ? ’

‘ Oh, Hartie, ’ I said, ‘ don’t go on with that now. It is quite shocking to speak Scripture texts in a playhouse. ’

That silenced her ; but I should like every one to know what her mind was upon all that time. We saw the side of the gallery above filling with

the Brookfield children, and I nodded up to Frances to show how much better off I was.

The orchestra began to play ; there were not very many of them ; and by-and-by the curtain drew up. It was a picture itself—an Italian lake and blue mountains ; and there was the cottage as natural as could be, just like Granny Wills's, and the mother putting on Red Ridinghood's cloak and basket, and singing—for most of it was singing—and then Red Ridinghood set off, and there came a funny man—the clown, Hartie called him—and talked most comically to the mother, and played antics, so that I laughed—oh ! I laughed.

Then the curtain came down, but it was up again very soon, and there was a real lovely wood, with the fairies dancing in it, all in white muslin with wings and short petticoats, singing ; and when Red Ridinghood with her basket came along, they danced round and sung warnings to her, that have rung in my head ever since :

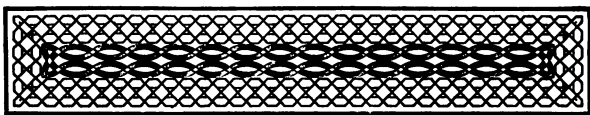
Stay, maiden, stay ;
Peril on the way.

But Red Ridinghood went on through them singing a verse about taking heed and her granny's need. Then came a whole band of ugly droll elves, with heads of dogs and cats and goats ; and they danced and tumbled head over heels, and wanted to stop her with their comical singing, but

she would go on. Then the clown came with things to sell, that all turned into something else ; but I don't remember that part so well, for there began to be a tremendous smell of paraffin, and some one behind the scenes cried out, ' Fire ! ' Then voices all round cried out, ' Fire ! ' and everybody started up, all screaming ; and Hartie and I got hold of one another and made for the passage, or were swept on by the others. But there's no telling how it was ; it was all pushing, and trampling, and screaming, and choking, and I think we got to the stairs, and that there was a falling, and a stifling and crushing, but after that—oh ! so frightful—there was no more—I don't remember any more. Oh ! don't ask——'

[And she fainted at the very thought.]





CHAPTER XVIII.

JESSIE'S LOG-BOOK—OVERBURY THEATRE.

JANUARY 21.—Since there is no school to-day I will describe as well as I can that fearful time, and tell of the mercy that was with us.

A pantomime was advertised at the little old theatre at Overbury, and the good-natured young Lord Brookfield proposed to treat the children to the sight of Red Ridinghood, and to send them, the girls one day, the boys the other, in his own conveyances; while Miss Freeward undertook to entertain the little ones at home.

The drive in the break with the two handsome carriage horses, or even in the large light waggon, was a delight in itself. Just as we were all packed in the young earl rode past, and the little girls all jumped up and bobbed their curtseys, and he took off his hat and waved it to them with such a merry face, calling out, 'Good luck to you;' and there

was another curtseying and buzz of 'Thank you, my lord.'

Everybody above eight years old was there except Fanny Brown, who had bronchitis, and Bertha Hewitt, who preferred to assert her independence and to go with Arthur Norton's sister to one of the better seats.

The boys gave us a ringing cheer from their playground, and off we set most joyously, every little pocket-handkerchief waving in the air. We put up at the livery stables at the 'George,' and the children walked through the street very orderly, two and two, as if they had been going to church. There was a great throng at the door, and it was some time before our turn came for admittance; but I had an order for thirty-eight to the upper gallery, and all the check-taker did was to count the numbers as we went in—thirty-six altogether, as two were missing. Up we went, along a narrow passage, and up three flights of stone stairs, with many turns in them, and then along another passage, till we were let into the gallery

To me, after what I had once or 'twice seen at Bath, the place looked very small and shabby, but it was very wonderful to the children, especially the drop scene and lights, which were only paraffin. The place is not used often enough to be fitted with gas, and can hardly be under much inspection.

The children were pleased to spy Bertha below,

for we were in a gallery at right angles with the front one, where the best seats were, and had a window behind us—darkened, of course. I own I was gratified at the behaviour of my flock, who sat as quietly as if they were in church, and I believe felt almost more awe-stricken by the novelty; while a large number of the town children who came tumbling up after us, apparently with no one to take care of them, were very rough and turbulent, poor things, eating, disputing, squabbling, and laughing, and talking out loud even after the curtain drew up, much to the amazement of the little Brookfielders.

Even after all that has happened I cannot forget the amazed face of little Lucy Ellis when there was a dance of fairies. I believe she thought them real, and she clung to me in a fright at the grotesque elves that followed them. I heard Rose murmur, 'Oh, this is—! this is—!' as if she could not find any word for the beauty of it, and we were too far off for her to see the common faces and coarse starched muslin of the poor fairies.

All this joy and delight was only too soon over. There was a cry of fire from behind the scenes. I fancy my children thought it part of the play, and so did not take alarm till the cry was echoed by screams all over the place, and every one began to spring up and rush for the doors. Happily I had come in last, and was at the outer end of the

bench, the two pupil-teachers just behind me. I did not see any fire, though I smelt paraffin, and I was quite sure that to try to rush down those stairs in a crowd was by far the greater danger at the moment. I gave the word to sit, and my dear good children obeyed me as if in school. I stood up, and tried to call to the others, who were scrambling to the door, to wait, but there was such a frightful noise that they could hardly have heard me, and they would not have minded me if they had. Those were very terrible moments. Annie Knowles, who, having gone on to the end, could see between the scenes, called out to me, 'Oh, ma'am, I see a smoke ! please let us go !' and there were a few little sobs and cries of 'We shall be burnt! Oh——' But I said again, 'Keep still, my dears ; we cannot go ; the door is choked. The fire will most likely be out in a minute ; and if it gets worse, we will get at the window and call to the people. Don't be afraid, God is taking care of you. Only sit still.'

I can't think how I did it ; God must have helped me, but I began to sing—

O God, our help in ages past,

and they all joined in, dear little things.

It came to me that if I began a prayer some might think themselves as good as dead, and that this hymn was a prayer. But they would never have

done it if Frances, Rose, Annie, and Kate had not taken it up at once. We had not finished the third verse when there was the sound of the lock of a door behind us—and there stood Mr. Pierce! Oh! as Rose said afterwards, it was like an angel come to deliver us.

‘You are there safe!’ said he. ‘Thank God! Down this way—there—straight down, out into the street. You’ll find a door open.’

I sent Frances first with little Grace Eden, who was nearly fainting with fright, and we got them all down in pairs, waiting so that each couple might have a fair start, while Mr. Pierce had time to say to me, ‘No hurry; no danger here, but there must be terrible work round there;’ and he shuddered. ‘But how did you get here?’ I asked; and he said that when he came running along the street, trying to find another door or opening, a woman was trying to unlock this one; she caught hold of him and said, ‘Oh! go up! go up! Let them out! Here’s the key! Jessie is up there—and I’m lame!’

Jessie! Was it Amy? He said it might be, but he had not stopped a moment to think, not knowing what state the inside might be in, and he thought I should find her in the street. Still I could not go till I had seen all my children out. There were none of the others left, only a boy and girl who had been knocked down in the scramble,

and were crying bitterly, and a big girl with a baby in her arms, crouched down on one of the seats. We saw them off, and then gave one glance down into the theatre. The curtain was still up, but most of the lights were out. It was empty, except for some helpless figures that men were carrying in from the door and laying down on the step.

Mr. Pierce would not let me look. 'Don't, don't,' he said; 'come down, come away!' and he held my hand tight all down those stone stairs, while the cool outside air came blowing up in my face. It was a different street from the one we had come in by.

There was a policeman guarding the opening till all were safe down, and the children drawn up in the street, all thirty-five of them, but no Amy. Frances, however, said in a bewildered way that she thought she had been there, trembling fit to drop, but that one of the fairies had come along, and called, 'Mrs. Petrelli, Mrs. Petrelli, you are wanted directly;' and she began, 'Tell my sister——' but she was hurried on and could not finish.

The children were crying and trembling; they said that people had kept on rushing at them as they came down, hoping to find their own little ones, and in despair when they proved to be strangers; and just then came the young earl, looking quite white and almost wild. 'Is it you, the mistress, Miss

Martin?' he called out. 'Are they safe?' And as I answered, 'Yes, my lord,' he quite gasped out to an elderly gentleman who had come with him, 'I thought I had been the death of all these children. Are they all here?—all safe?'

'All thirty-five, my lord,' I said; 'I counted them out.'

'All but Teacher Bertha. Bertha Hewitt went out by that door,' went a terrible murmur among the children, for they knew by this time what 'that door' meant.

'Bertha Hewitt! Old Hewitt's daughter!' he cried, and in a few words we told him that she was not with us, but Annie and the others had seen her and her companion sucked into that terrible passage, as if they could not stop themselves. Poor young Lord Brookfield was very much shocked and quite overcome, and turned to the old gentleman, Sir James Larpent, to ask what could be done. 'Her father is my keeper, the best of fellows,' he said. 'I've known them all my life—fine girl—pride of their hearts——'

Sir James said the first thing to be done was to send these children safe to their home, and desired me to take them to the station; and then Lord Brookfield came a little to his senses, and said, 'They drove, didn't they?' and we walked them to the stables. There the drivers—namely, the groom and Master Knowles—had hurried off in great alarm,

the landlady said, on hearing of the fire. No doubt they were in the miserable crowd at the other door, struggling to know the fate of their children. Lord Brookfield went to fetch them, and the landlady, either by the gentleman's orders or out of her own kindness, made all the poor trembling sobbing children sit down, and gave them some tea. I was parched enough to be very glad to swallow some, but very few could eat a morsel ; and Rose was so hysterical that I was afraid she would set off all the others, and I had to get her away and scold her. My very throat ached with wanting to cry, but I did not dare ; I did not venture on anything to upset the rest, and we all were shaken enough when Annie rushed up to her father and burst out sobbing. And the tears were running down his face too as he said, 'My maid, my maid, how could I ever have gone home to mother without thee ?'

The horses had been put to, meantime, and when the children had all been packed in, and were safe to go home to their friends, I said to the gentlemen as we stood in the inn yard that I could not go home without trying to find out what had become of poor Bertha, since if she was living there ought to be some one to take care of her. They said that was right, and Lord Brookfield then bethought himself to take his horse and ride to the lodge, so as to send in her parents. 'Though how I shall ever tell them I cannot think,' he said.

‘At any rate,’ said his friend, ‘you have nothing to reproach yourself with in this case. If she had been with the others, as you intended, she would have been saved by this brave young woman.’

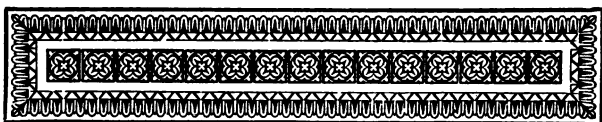
Then he asked if I had any one to go with me, and Mr. Pierce came forward and made some explanation, at which Sir James bent his head, but he went with us to the theatre to the door we had come out by. The superintendent of police was watching there, and he explained that, as, of course, there was more hope of saving the uppermost of the terrible mass wedged together on those stairs, men had gone in that way, and were carrying the poor creatures out and laying them in the gallery, where some doctors were seeing which cases were alive, and if there were life they were carried out, and either borne off by waiting friends or taken to the hospital. No one was to be let come up the stairs till the sad work was over, and he thought it nearly was so now, as the same had been going on at the bottom of the stair by the other entrance. Much of this frightful destruction of young life had been caused by the locking up of all the doors but one, so as to employ only one person to take the payments.

When the superintendent heard that the poor girl we sought had been in the first gallery, he shook his head, and said he feared there was little hope for her. Just then a policeman came down,

looking white and marked with blood. 'All out now, sir,' he said; 'the stair is clear, but there's fifteen corpses, women and children, lying on the benches! Awful sight as ever I saw. Doctor thinks one girl may have life in her; they are getting her down. She had so tight hold of another poor lass, there was no getting them apart at first.'

And between two men, with arm hanging down hair dropping about, clothes torn to rags, there was something that I knew—I can hardly tell how—to be bright, handsome Bertha Hewitt!





CHAPTER XIX.

JESSIE'S LOG-BOOK—WOLF.

MY first notion was, when they told me that Bertha was alive, to take her to the 'George,' for her parents to convey her home; but when the doctor who was carrying the board on which she lay heard that her home was three miles off, he said that it was impossible, and that the only hope for her was in taking her at once to the hospital, though he feared they might be very full there. He thought there were injuries which must be attended to at once, and remedies must be applied to restore animation. And, indeed, before they could get her to the great building, about a hundred yards off, the air brought on a bleeding which almost choked her, and was terrible to witness, except that it proved that she was alive. It was dark by that time, and Mr. Pierce saw us to the door, and said he would go to meet Mr. and Mrs. Hewitt with the tidings, such as they were, and then come back for me. It was all

like a dream, or as if I were going to waken and find it was not real, when I followed up the big stone steps into the hall. They carried Bertha away, and would not let me follow, but left me to wait in the hall, where a good many anxious friends were watching—some to have their patients restored with hurts attended to, some to hear a hopeful report, some to be admitted for a few moments to a hopeless bedside.

I had not had a moment before to think of Amy. I knew her at least to be safe ; and as to the strange name Frances 'had repeated, Peters had been Fred's mother's maiden name, and his own full Christian name was Frederick Peters, which accounted for his taking it. I was thinking how I could succeed in making my way to her with Mr. Pierce's help, when I heard a familiar sound on the stone stairs, and down them came, with a dazed, dreary, forlorn look, my poor Amy herself !

I sprang across, and she almost fell into my arms off the last step, clinging tight to me. ' Oh, Jessie ! ' she said, ' he is so bad, and they won't let me stay with him ! ' and then she grew faint, for she was quite worn out ; but she kept up, leaning against me, though she could not speak, and only moaned a little from time to time, ' Poor Fred ! ' and, ' So burnt ! So burnt ! ' Some one came and wanted to take her off as a fresh patient, and when I explained, said we must not stay crowding up



AMY FOUND AT LAST.

the hall, but consented when I said that I was waiting to hear about the last patient who had been brought in ; and she was allowed to stay with me till at last the young doctor who brought her out came down to say that Bertha had been put to bed, and I might come and see her for a moment. Her leg is badly broken, and three ribs, but if there are no internal injuries she may recover ; though of course there is no knowing yet, she is so fearfully crushed and bruised all over, and there may be concussion of the brain, for she is almost unconscious, only moaning a little now and then, and looking indeed like death. It seems that she fell above poor Miss Norton, and this saved her life, if saved she is, by God's good mercy. I was just turning away from the sad sight, when her father and mother were brought up, hardly able to restrain themselves, poor people, though they knew that otherwise they would not be allowed there, for there was a patient in every bed all along the ward, and we heard groanings from one, and choked sobbings of some friend from another. Her mother went down on her knees and called her, and we thought her eyelids moved ; but I knew I must not stay, and as I turned away Mr. Hewitt caught hold of both my hands and said, ' Oh, Miss Martin, if I had only stood out, and made her go with you ! ' I could only squeeze his hand, and say how much I hoped she would do well, and then I

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went down to Amy. Outside the door, whom should I find but Mr. Pierce, waiting with a fly! He said the gentleman had told him to see to it, and together we persuaded my sister to go home with me, instead of back to her lodgings, since she was sure not to be admitted again to the hospital till the morning, and Mr. Pierce engaged to get her to the station for the first train. Indeed, she seemed so worn out as to be able to feel little more than that there was some one to take care of her; and if she could not be with that husband of hers, she felt it a sort of rest to be with me and do what she was bidden. She lay back in the corner of the fly, only holding my hand and not speaking, and perhaps dozing. I durst not speak to her then, for all her mind was on 'poor Fred,' and I had picked up words here and there which made me suspect that all the mischief and agony and loss of life, and the misery that night in so many houses, were owing to him; and it was not possible to me at that moment not to feel that anything he suffered served him right, and of course there was no showing her what I felt, so I held my tongue. Mr. Pierce had gone on upon his bicycle, and I saw the red light of it now and then when I looked out, like a star on the slope of the hill in front, making me feel that I had a friend.

When at last the carriage stopped, there seemed by the lamp-light quite a little crowd

waiting to hear about poor Bertha. There were the vicar and his lordship, and Mr. Dyke, and Mr. Shepherd, and ever so many more. The vicar took hold of my hand, and shook it with all his might, and said, 'What does not this village owe to you, Miss Martin!' His lordship was beginning, 'Give her three cheers;' but I could not help crying out, 'Please don't; my sister is here, and her husband is very much hurt.' So they were good enough to stop when they saw poor Amy's white face, as Mr. Dyke and I almost lifted her out, and took her into the house, which was all warm and cheery, for Mrs. Bolton and Frances and Rose were there, and had got tea ready and all comfortable. Mrs. Bolton ran up and put her arms round and kissed and hugged and cried over me, for it seems they had had a terrible alarm; some one came down from the station and said the theatre was on fire, and all the children in it burnt or stifled in trying to get out. Some of the mothers had set out like mad things, and the first relief they had was when Lord Brookfield came galloping up and said all were safe and on the way home.

Mr. Hardwicke made everybody come away except Governess Betsy. Rose begged hard to stay and sleep on the couch, but her father was glad to take her home with him, and quiet was what we wanted. Indeed, I believe Mr. Hardwicke made Mrs. Bolton promise not to make us talk.

And how good she was ! I doubt whether either of us would have touched a morsel if she had not been there, Amy was so spent, and I so sick with what I had seen ; but there was no disappointing her when she took such pains with the rashers and the eggs she had got, and coaxed us like a mother, and the food and tea really did us both a great deal of good. Then she helped me get my sister to bed like a little child, and would have done the same by me, only I wanted a little time for sitting still and alone before there could be any composing myself to rest, after those fearful sights, and that great mercy.

Neither of us slept much that night. Closing my eyes brought back the sight of the poor children rushing into that passage where they became one mass of death, and the sound of the stifled screams would ring in my ears ; and Amy must have been as wakeful, judging by her breathing. But in the darkness of the late morning, after we heard the clock strike five, the fresh day seemed to have begun, and we felt able to talk.

Amy told me all about herself, and how grieved she had been to leave me in that sudden way, and never to write to me ; but her husband had been made so angry by my trying to keep them apart, that he had forced a promise from her never to hold any communication with me without his consent, and his change of name had greatly lessened my chances of hearing of them.

It seems that he had quitted the panorama people, and engaged himself to act as carpenter and scene-shifter to this itinerant company. He found that there was a good deal of work to be done in which Amy, from her training in the upholstery business, could be useful ; and he also hoped to make her voice profitable. He had invested my ten pounds in the affair, and was in part proprietor. So he came and claimed her, and she was only too glad to go with him ; and though shocked at the manner of leaving me, I don't think she could quite forgive my having kept my meeting with him a secret from her.

How wives do love ! It is enough to make any one dread opening the heart so as to admit such chains of bondage. And yet every one is not like Fred ; there are some much more worthy, who would never make a bad use of such affection.

Amy declares that throughout the six weeks they have been together, he has been as kind and good to her as possible ; and no doubt he has been enough on his good behaviour to allow her to think so. He was much disappointed to find that her voice, though sweet, is far too weak to be used in the theatricals ; and she declares that he was wonderfully kind, and not at all angry.

No, indeed, for whom had he to thank for the spoiling of that voice ?

However, she had a great deal to do, as check-

taker, in contriving stage furniture and making costumes, and teaching the children their parts. Four belonged to the manager, and three had been hired or bought somehow or other, and she had been much shocked at their ignorance of all that is good, and she hopes in time to teach them a little more. She has taught the little girl who waits on her, and who acted Red Ridinghood, to say her prayers.

Of course it is a poor little company, living from hand to mouth, and saving whatever cost they can. The manager fixes where they go, and actually Amy did not know she was coming to Overbury till she saw the name at the station ; and then her husband, guessing what she was thinking of, forbade her letting me know or trying to see me. Most likely he threatened and raged ; but she did not tell me, any more than she did that if he had ever taken the pledge, he had certainly not kept it.

The company had hired this theatre for more than they could well afford, and finding more entrances than they had doorkeepers and check-takers for, they closed up the door leading direct to the stairs to the gallery where we were. Amy, being in charge of the stage properties, and one of the very few careful people belonging to the concern, was in charge of the keys. She says she did ask if it were not dangerous, and contrary to

the regulations, to have only one exit to the galleries. But she was laughed at ; it was what had been done many times, and no harm had come of it. She was placed as check-taker at the end of the passage to the other gallery, so that she watched us come in though we could not see her. When every one had arrived, and the performance was in progress, she set off to carry away the checks, and to make her way to the actors' entrance, in case her help should be wanted in the green-room, as it often was ; for she must have been a generally useful person to them all.

Going slowly down the stairs, she had got into the street when she heard the cry of ' Fire ! ' and saw people pouring out of the door leading from the stalls. She could not possibly get through them, and while holding by the wall she heard some one say, ' The fire is a false alarm ; the panic is the danger.'

Then with horror she thought of me, whom she had seen, though I could not see her. She made her way to the door just as Mr. Pierce was hurrying to see what could be done, and sent him to our rescue. The children had begun to come down, and she was reassured about me, when one of their troop came in search of her, and told her of her husband's accident. She found him dreadfully burnt with paraffin, and in such a state that nothing could be done but to carry him to the hospital ;

but she declares that she was too much occupied with him to know how it happened.

In truth, she *will* not understand, poor love. The fact was that poor Fred had been indulging in glass after glass, and did not quite know what he was about. He fell into a dispute with the Wolf while arranging the scene in the grandmother's cottage ; swore he could play Wolf much better, and would do, being one of the proprietors ; tried to pull Wolf out of bed ; broke it down ; and upset the can of paraffin, so that the drapery caught fire. The other man escaped, but Fred was entangled. Then the cry of ' Fire ! ' rose, and instantly every one was rushing out. Those in the stalls escaped easily, as the door opened without difficulty ; but that turn in the steep stone stairs made an awful trap, as it were. Some one fell ; others tumbled over ; the place became choked with struggling creatures, mostly girls, big lads, and some children. There cannot be less than fifty killed, and many, many more terribly injured. This was the history Mr. Pierce told me, while she was out of hearing. He has borrowed a trap to drive her to the station, and will bring her back in the evening if possible, or let me know about her and if I should go to her. I had to stay at home on account of the school, but the vicar has been in to say he had thought it best for us all that there should be a holiday. The quiet is a great comfort. But does Amy want me ?

After all it was not much quiet ; so many people have come in to see me and talk. I am glad Amy is out of their way. Rose was here before seven this morning, and begs with tears to wait on me as she does when she sleeps here. Then came the two Miss Freewards, wanting to hear all, and trembling ; and Miss Margaret fairly crying. When they got up to go away Miss Freeward said, 'I am afraid we have done you a great injustice, and I can only ask your pardon.'

I could only say, 'Oh, ma'am !' and something about being sure they meant to act for the best ; and then Miss Margaret actually caught my hands and kissed me, and her sister did the same, so kindly that I was quite overcome, and could not help shedding some tears too.

It is all warm feeling, I suppose, for having kept the children still ; such a matter does not in the least contradict all that I am dismissed for.

January 22.—Amy came back in the evening and brought her things, that good friend looking after her as he had promised. There is no knowing yet how Fred's burns will turn out ; he does not seem to suffer much, but is in a torpid, half-conscious state. If he had more pain they say it would be a better sign. I am to go in with her to-day, as I am wanted at the inquest. I can't think why. Poor Bertha is much in the same state.

8 o'clock.—Amy is safe in bed. She takes comfort that her husband does not suffer, but the nurse told me that this is a very bad sign, and that he is not in a state of health likely to recover ; but, as he does not know her, we have persuaded her to rest to-morrow unless she is sent for. There is a little more hope for Bertha, but there is no knowing yet. Poor Miss Norton was quite dead, and Arthur is broken-hearted, for she never would have gone to the theatre if he had not teased her to take Bertha. Annie Knowles was sent for to the inquest too, for it seems that some one had found out that no one but ourselves inside that dreadful place remained still, or had any notion of what was going on. Rose has got it into her head that we were like the crew of the 'Birkenhead,' and murmurs to herself, 'As mute as on parade,' which we were not. The children had learnt and paraphrased the poem upon that wreck, and Rose says she thought of it, and it may have helped some of the others, though they do not live in imagination and fancy, as she does. Yet perhaps the sense of 'the holy force of discipline' came to help them to be so good and obedient. Annie Knowles answered all she was asked very nicely, and was told she was a good girl, and was thanked for her evidence. Both she and I had to tell what we saw and heard from our places, and I got much more complimenting than it seems to me could be deserved ; for

when there was no fire visible, and scarcely any smoke, surely any person of common sense would know that the greater danger was in the choked passages; and as to the discipline, every trained mistress is instructed in that. The blame rests with those who would not take precautions for egress; and chiefly, alas! with my poor brother-in-law, who is indeed paying the penalty. The verdict could only be 'Accidental death,' but with strong censure on the proprietors of the company for the fastening up of the doors. Amy says it will be the ruin of them, and I cannot but feel that they deserve it; only when people have often done risky things without damage they forget that there is almost the guilt of murder incurred by carelessness of life. I am glad no one thought of sending for Amy to ask about the closing of the entrances. There were two newspaper gentlemen about, and both Annie and I were put through an interrogation much worse than the coroner's, though one of them gave her half a sovereign afterwards; and the other, seeing, I suppose, that that would not do for me, assured me that he should have great pleasure in doing full justice to my heroic conduct! I nearly asked him to let it alone. I am most thankful for our preservation, but I hate all this fuss about the way of it.

23rd.—The vicar gave thanks at church for the great mercy vouchsafed; and preached on the text,

'The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth for evermore.' It was very beautiful, and tears were shed by many, no doubt as they thought how different it is here from the churches and schools at Overbury, where they say there is not one Sunday school that has not lost some of its scholars.

His lordship came up and made me shake hands after church, and said he must thank me again for having spared him what would have been a lifelong trouble to him, and told me that he hoped I should not leave the school I managed to such good purpose.

I don't know about that, for the same objections must exist ; and anybody with a little firmness and common sense would have done the same. But it will be harder now to part ; every one is so very kind, Miss Freeward and all. Mr. Bryce sent a sweetbread with his compliments (those must have been Mrs. Bryce's putting in). It is a funny sort of a testimonial, but it really was good for Amy to have it to dress. She says I have grown thin, and she is sure I have not attended properly to my food while she was away, and that she shall see to it when she leaves me again upon Fred's recovery.

26th.—His recovery—that was my last word, though written with doubts whether she were not deceiving herself with false hopes. And so she was. A change came on that very evening, and he died

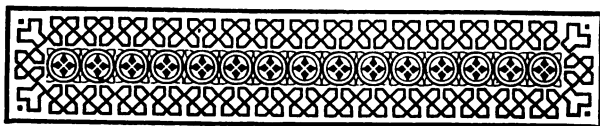
at one o'clock that night, without ever showing any consciousness. Poor Amy mourns over not having gone in the last day, but they all say it was well she did not, as he was quite past taking any notice, and there was much that it would be a misery to her to recollect. He had no one belonging to him but ourselves. Our father took him home when he was twelve years old, when my uncle died, and treated him like a son ; but he had been used to idle company, and had learnt habits and tastes there was no overcoming, though he had better times, and thus won poor Amy's whole heart. Father prevented their marrying as long as he lived ; but after he died, Fred had a fit of steadiness long enough to persuade Amy that father would have consented. But why should I write this when I only want to be in charity with the dead ? He was a fine-looking, clever man, and the vicar reminds me that love has clearer eyes than dislike, so that Amy may not be blind when she declares that he was really wishing to do better, and grieving when his resolution gave way (as it always did). No one knows what may have passed while he seemed senseless ; and the nurse says there were mutterings about good wife, and mercy, and forgiveness. It is a very poor shred of comfort, but it is all my poor sister has to lay hold of, so who would take it from her ?

The hospital people were in haste for the funeral, and I have enough left to pay the ex-

penses. The vicar yielded, not very willingly perhaps, to Amy's fervent desire that Fred should lie here, with a strange feeling as if this quiet church-yard, under the lime trees, could give him peace. I am not sure whether she has taken in that we are not likely to stay here. I tried to tell her so, but she was so distracted with grief that she did not seem to hear or understand, while it is all I can do not to feel freed from a burthen.

We laid him in the grave at seven o'clock this morning. The vicar chose the time because it would be the quietest of all ; and no one knew of it but the few who brought the coffin from the station, where it had been left by the train at night. It was very cold, dark, and strange, and it seemed to freeze up even poor Amy's tears ; but when I looked up and saw the light of dawn, and that beautiful morning star in the east, I felt as if there were a new and better beginning in store for her. She says she likes to be alone ; and though perhaps it is because she feels that my sympathy with her cannot be perfect, it is well that I should be free for my duties.





CHAPTER XX.

A BUDGET OF LETTERS.

The Earl of Brookfield to Lady Mary Brooke.

January 20.

MY DEAR POLLY,—You have made us all make asses of ourselves by turning off the best schoolmistress in the county, who has saved the lives of all your dearly beloved children. I never felt so like a fool in my life as when Larpent congratulated us upon our treasure. Catch me listening to womanfolk again ! You will hear enough about it from the others, and it makes me sick to think about it. I shall never forget the relief it was to see the little crowd in the street, and to find they were our own lot. It was by her own fault that poor Hewitt's girl was not safe with them. I am afraid hers is a bad case.

Your affectionate
B.

Miss Freeward to Lady Mary.

January 20.

MY DEAR LADY MARY,—You will see the history of this dreadful affair in the newspapers. We have just heard the whole in detail from those who were so mercifully saved ; and while Margaret writes that to you I wish to ask whether it is not best to retract our decision as to Miss Martin, who, there is no doubt, actually saved the lives of our children by her presence of mind. We are much struck with the modest—nay, I may say devout manner in which she seems to feel the matter ; and I confess that our representation to you was perhaps hasty, and founded too much upon rumour. Indeed, before this I had found it both strange and provoking, that whereas it seemed that the general voice of the parish was against her, no sooner was notice given to her than the cry was, ‘ We shall never have so good a mistress ; ’ and Betsy Bolton, who had more complaints than any one else, came very near scolding me for our decision. I thought then that she only spoke out of compassion and dangerous indifference to character ; but I have since come to the conclusion that she had previously only been grumbling out of loyalty to her mother, without any notion that her words could have consequences. All the allegations about the sister were plainly exaggerated ; and as there is very little hope of the

poor man's recovery, the great objection would be removed. I confess I felt uncomfortable at acting in opposition to the vicar's express judgment, nor should I have done so but that I thought him deceived by a plausible woman, and there had certainly been a want of openness. Your brother is most eager to recall the dismissal; but Mr. Hardwicke doubts whether it will now be of any use, as he has had a letter to inquire about Miss Martin with a view to an excellent position, and of course her conduct on this occasion will be all in her favour.

Poor Bertha Hewitt's wilfulness seems to have led her into this misfortune. I am afraid she has been conceited and spoilt, and that the naughtiness I attributed to bad example was really the spirit of opposition to discipline. Poor dear child, I cannot say much of her faults while she still hovers between life and death; but from what Betsy tells me, and indeed I lately saw myself, I am afraid this was the case. May God's mercy spare the dear child! Mrs. Shepherd enlarges on the improvement in Rose, who is much more steady and useful than ever before, and devoted to Miss Martin. Altogether I think we have been mistaken, and I feel greatly humbled at the thought.

Yours affectionately,

CAROLINE FREEWARD.

Lady Mary to Miss Freeward.

January 24.

MY DEAR CAROLINE,—My poor dear children ! The horror of the thing quite haunts me, and I can never be thankful enough for the preservation of our own, or grateful enough to that sensible mistress. I am sorry there was such a feeling against her, but I do not wonder that you were swayed by it. Pray do as you and Mr. Hardwicke think best ; indeed, it is really absurd to write as if I had a voice. I wish I could come down, but my poor aunt cannot spare me ; and I must write to the vicar. How ashamed I am of having had any share in overriding him ! I do hope the mistress will stay.

Yours ever affectionately,

M. C. B.

LOG-BOOK.

27th.—One of the advertisers in the ‘School Guardian’ has written asking for my testimonials, offering a very high salary. I went to the vicarage to ask Mr. Hardwicke to write, and he smiled and said, ‘I doubt whether they will be required, Miss Martin—that is, if you can overlook the treatment you have received.’

I could only say, 'Thank you, sir ; I had rather stay here than anywhere.' 'This is informal,' he said, laughing : 'we managers are going to meet this afternoon, but, let me tell you, our minds were pretty well made up, even before that poor man's death. You had outweighed any possible brother-in-law.'

And by-and-by, just as I had dismissed the school, he came with the eldest Miss Freeward to tell me that the managers begged me to consider their notice as withdrawn.

Mr. Hardwicke, however, added that he knew the offer I had received from that town school was of a much higher salary than can be afforded here, and that there would be several assistants under me, so that the managers could not complain if I decided on accepting it. I asked leave to answer in the morning ; for though my own wishes are altogether here, Amy must be consulted, and she may quite possibly feel that she has not been well used here, and may like to begin in a new place. This is a voluntary school that is offered to me, and Church teaching is a stipulation ; otherwise I should not give it a second thought, but it would be worse than ever to leave this place now.

28th.—Happily Amy is of the same mind. She could not bear the idea of going away from her husband's grave, to say nothing of her dread of a fresh beginning. So I have thankfully given in my answer that here we stay ; and it is great happiness

to see the joy this produced in the children, and the kind welcome from every one else.

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March 28.—The schedules are come in after the inspection. We have passed 90 per cent., and everybody is in excellent spirits, but I trust to do better next year. I wonder whether Bertha will ever be able to return? I saw her on Saturday, and she is longing for it; but, though her recovery is wonderful, she is still very frail, and can hardly walk even with crutches. Lady Mary is sending her to a Convalescent Home, as sea air is prescribed for her. She asked me with tears to forgive all the trouble she had given me, and assured me she will be a very different girl if she ever is allowed to come back.

Amy is growing more cheerful. I believe, though she will not endure to hear me say so, that the peacefulness of having it all over is better for her than the wearing, pining suspense. Though of course she keeps very quiet, she does not shrink from everybody, for, since all know her to be a widow and not a deserted wife, the miserable sense of shame seems to have passed from her. All is very pleasant now; there is a feeling of confidence, friendliness, and working together amongst all; and the children, though of course sometimes idle and naughty, are on the whole doing well, and some are very good.

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June 19.—Philip Pierce has a new situation, twenty miles off. When I came in this evening I found that he and Amy had laid their heads together, and they both declared that there could be no reason that he should not go away engaged to me! I have not set down all his kind looks and words all through these months, nor how they made my heart beat and flutter; it seemed so silly to do so, or to dwell on them: but no gentleman could have been more delicate in not harassing me while I was watching over Amy's trouble, nor taking advantage of what he did for us at Overbury. He says he was content while he was living here to watch and get a word and look from me now and then, and to believe that I did care for him a little; but, now he is going out of reach, he wants to know that we belong to one another, and to be able to write. He does not ask for more for five or seven years, or whenever we may have put by enough for it to be prudent. And—and—I am very—very happy indeed. He is the dearest fellow in the world, and Amy says it would be quite wicked to put him off any longer, so I won't try to cross my own heart. He is so good and true—a really religious man—a staff to rest on. The thought is like sunshine on before me. I must try to be worthy of him, my own Philip—my own, I hope and believe, now and for ever,

Bertha to Miss Emily.

Brookfield : July 1.

HONOURED AND DEAR MADAM,—After all your kindness, you will be glad to hear that I reached home safely, and father and mother could hardly believe their eyes ; I look so much better than when I went away. They thank you and all the ladies for the kindness and care I have received. I could not write till to-day ; there were so many to see. Frances looks quite a woman, and Rose has her hair turned up. Oh ! wasn't it nice to see them again ? Miss Martin kissed me, as she did before I went away, and I may begin at school after the summer holidays ; they will not let me go before, so that my leg may be quite strong. I rested in Miss Martin's house before going home. Mrs. Martin looked very pretty in her weeds, and gentle and pale. She gave me some tea and nice little hot cakes, and seemed as if she could not do enough for me. It seems strange now how we all could believe such nonsense and be so set against them ; and Governess Betsy won't believe she ever had a fault to find with them.

I do not know if it is a secret, but Rose told me that Miss Martin is engaged to Mr. Pierce. It is quite right, Rose says, that she should marry their deliverer, though they will have to wait for years and years to come ; so I hope I shall go on

with her as long as I am a pupil-teacher ; and I do hope to show that I am a better and wiser girl for this long illness, and all your kindness to me.—
I remain your loving and thankful

BERTHA HEWITT.



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